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Understanding the Formal Help-Seeking Experiences of Gay Men Who Have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MPhil, Walden University, 2020

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Once deemed a family matter by human service professionals, intimate partner violence (IPV) is a social and global concern impacting all populations and communities. Until the late 1980s, IPV among gay couples has been an area of study often overlooked in scholarly research. However, according to recent studies, IPV among gay couples is more prevalent than the violence between opposite sex couples. Researchers have demonstrated that gay men and IPV is still under-researched, and many studies do not address gay men, IPV, and their willingness to seek formal help from an abusive relationship. This study used a generic qualitative inquiry to explore the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men in IPV relationships. An intersectionality approach was used to explore various experiences of gay men and IPV for a deeper understanding of the intersections of being a gay man and a victim of IPV. Zoom video conferencing was used to interview 11 gay men, over 18 years of age, previously in an IPV relationship, who tried to seek formal help, having at least one encounter with law enforcement, and resided within the continental United States. Data were collected, analyzed using the Dedoose data analysis software to help understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men. Three major themes emerged: (a) continued discrimination towards gay men, (b) a lack of resources for gay men and the need for further training for law enforcement, and (c) the negative attitude of those experiencing IPV towards police. Members of the gay community as well as law enforcement may benefit from this study through informing improved relationships and the findings may impact social change for better services and resources for gay men and IPV.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my paternal and maternal grandparents: Mr. Albert L. Williams Sr., Mrs. Mary C. Williams, Pastor Earnest O. King Sr., and First Lady Emogene King; my uncle: Mr. Earnest O. King, Jr.; and professional mentors: Lieutenant Sidney C. Holmes and Captain Jonathan D. Parnell. Each of these individuals helped develop me from childhood throughout my adulthood and offered support and encouragement to continue my education despite the odds and obstacles while working in my professional capacity. Although they are no longer here in the physical body, their memories remain forever imprinted in my heart. I am sure each are sending bright rays of light from above knowing that I have achieved this goal.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) was once considered a private family matter. Service providers such as advocates, social workers, law enforcement, and even the laws were not designed to address this behavior. During the early 1970s and 1980s law enforcement officers, specifically, believed intimate partner violence was a problem for the family, not the police, to work out (Bridgett, 2020). In the early 1980s the United States begin to view IPV as a crime rooted in power and control which led to human service providers giving attention to victims through services and resources (Goodmark, 2017). Over the last 40 years, IPV has evolved into a social issue and professional responses now include policy changes, police response, and training (Russell & Sturgeon, 2018).

Professionals' focus was on response and services mainly towards women victims in heterosexual relationships. Traditionally, women have experienced intimate partner violence more often than men. According to Albright et al. (2020), one in four women and one in 10 men experience IPV in her or his lifetime. Comparatively, the IPV rate among opposite-sex couples is one in four versus one in five among same-sex couples (Calton et al., 2016). Despite the higher prevalence of IPV within same-sex relationships, viewpoints, resources, and services have focused predominately on heterosexual relationships (Furman et al., 2017). Consequently, same-sex relationships, specifically gay men, receive fewer resources and knowledge about this population is scarce

(Goldberg-Looney et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is little research on the impact of violence on sexual minorities (Chen et al., 2020).

Gay men experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than their counterparts (Bacchus et al., 2018; Raghavan et al., 2019; Russell & Stureon, 2018) yet their experiences with IPV are not perceived as serious as heterosexuals (Freeland et al., 2018; Russell et al., 2015). Specifically, the gay man's IPV experience is overlooked in scholarly research (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017) and there is an inadequate amount of literature documenting the gay man's experiences with intimate partner violence (Callan et al., 2020). Lack of training, stigma, and marginalization are key factors gay men face when seeking assistance from professionals while in a relationship that includes IPV. These factors coupled with intersectionalities of race, gender, and sexual orientation contribute to the negative responses by professionals towards gay men. With the high prevalence of intimate partner violence among gay men and the lack of services to address their unique needs, it is essential for service providers to develop a culturally responsive approach to help understand gay men's IPV experiences (Furman et al., 2017). However, the consequences of the recent global pandemic have impacted even further IPV services for gay men.

Stay-at-home orders because of the COVID-19 pandemic can be a trigger for IPV (Stephenson et al., 2021) and limited opportunities for social support and help seeking for IPV (Peterman et al., 2020). Specifically, the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted the increased risks of intimate partner violence and access to supportive services (Wood et al., 2021). During the pandemic there is exclusive focus on women who experience IPV,

while conversations on how COVID-19 affects the rates of IPV among gay men is limited (Stephenson et al., 2020).

Throughout my review of the existing literature, I did not find scholarly research on understanding the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who had experienced intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, further research is needed to understand the unique issues gay men go through when seeking formal help to escape an abusive partner while also experiencing the impact of a global pandemic. The results of this study might contribute to social change by helping service providers and members of marginalized populations work together to address intimate partner violence.

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the current study, the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research question, the theoretical foundation, as well as the nature and significance of the study. The following overview of the literature discussed helps support the theoretical foundation for undertaking the study of this population.

Background of the Problem

IPV was once considered a private matter which subsequently became a social and global health concern affecting populations from all communities (Dame et al., 2020). Although legislation such as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 brought attention to gender-based violence against women it excluded marginalized groups (Singh & Bullock, 2020). Ultimately, the VAWA law was reauthorized and tailored interventions to meet the specific and unique needs of marginalized populations

including gay men (Freeland et al., 2018). Despite these changes in the law, not much is known about the factors that contribute to IPV with gay men (Goldberg et al., 2016).

The above-mentioned studies demonstrate the necessity for additional research on marginalized populations like gay men and IPV experiences. History has shown services and resources have not always been geared towards gay men in an abusive relationship. As a result of machismo and macrosocial dynamics, such as a lack of services for gay men, some gay men minimize their IPV experiences and its severity (Oliffe et al., 2014; Rollé et al., 2018) and there is a low number of reported intimate partner violence incidents in same-sex couples of IPV (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016). These authors concluded that IPV intervention with gay men should include behavioral factors reducing stigmas and redefining roles which may help address tension in same-sex relationships. As a result of past conflict and institutionalized homophobia, perceptions of IPV laws by lesbians, gays, and bisexuals were described to lack trust in the justice system that includes law enforcement (Guadalupe-Diaz & Yglesias, 2013; Parry & O'Neal 2015). These findings were described as demonstrative of the differences and gaps in the way IPV laws are perceived by the LGB community and whether they felt protected by those laws. Raising public awareness about IPV among same-sex couples and the lack of legal protection from an abusive partner became important (Barret 2015; Chaiken 2019).

A lack of legal protections and the legal system's level of hostility towards same-sex relationships is more pointedly seen as a barrier for gay men and not taken seriously by service providers (Durfee & Goodmark, 2020). To help understand the barriers, issues,

needs, challenges, and formal help-seeking experiences with service provisions for gay men, it is suggested service providers should include input from members of the LGBTQ community (Furman, et al., 2017). Three identified barriers for members of LGBTQ IPV survivors include limited understanding by scholars and service providers, stigma, and systemic inequalities (Calton et al., 2016). Additional studies should include communication between the LGBTQ population, researchers, advocates, and policymakers to address these barriers (Calton et al., 2016). Goldberg et al. (2016) suggested for a better understanding of risk factors or signs of violence within an intimate relationship, future research should include recruitment of members from the LGBTQ community (Calton et al., 2016). In 2020, the impact of a global pandemic's (COVID-19) mandatory quarantine contributed to higher levels of reported IPV victimization among gay men (Stephenson et al., 2020). The strain of the pandemic coupled with decreases in social support and resources creates an environment among gay couples which may trigger IPV behavior (Walsh et al. 2021). Including perspectives from gay men in IPV relationships helps to understanding the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and might contribute to positive social change for citizens.

Problem Statement

IPV occurs within one of every five same-sex romantic relationships (Calton et al., 2016). Hart and Klein (2013) and Barnett (2015) suggested that although numerous studies on heterosexual intimate partner violence have been conducted, research on IPV and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) experiences is limited,

findings are mixed, and standard definitions are not adequate to define IPV among LGBTQ couples. Specifically, research on intimate partner violence among gay men is under-researched and causes a lack of consensus in areas like scope, severity, and range (Goldberg et al., 2016). Some scholars suggest gay men experience intimate partner violence more than heterosexual men and women (Furman et al., 2017). Additionally, intimate partner violence has greater incidents among gay men, with a lifetime prevalence reported to be between 29.7% and 78.0% (Bacchus et al., 2018). Despite such prevalence, the responses by service providers have mainly been towards women.

Information on intimate partner violence and law enforcement response is best known from research involving samples from women (Finneran & Stephenson, 2013). However, the late 1980s researchers began looking at intimate partner violence among same-sex relationships (Durfee & Goodmark, 2020). Yet, there is still little research on gay men's understanding of intimate partner violence and their wiliness to seek formal help (Salter et al., 2020). Collins (2016) described fear and hatred (by anyone) towards gay men and the assumption heterosexuality is normal as leading factors of inequitable application of the law towards gay men. The perceptions of gay men toward intimate partner violence law (law enforcement) are often negative and influences how this population (among others in the LGBTQ community) may seek out help (Guadalupe-Diaz & Yglesias, 2013). Furthermore, when reporting incidents of violence, men in same-sex relationships are often faced with distinct challenges such as heterosexist attitudes, perceptions of femininity compromising masculinity, and a lack of abuse shelters for gay men (Russell et al., 2015). These challenges are often because of a lack of knowledge and

scarce resources specifically to meet their needs. As a result, gay men facing IPV rely on informal sources of support to meet their needs (Freeland et al., 2018) and display low levels of confidence in the sensitivity and effectiveness of law enforcement officials which are potential barriers to resources (Brown & Herman, 2015).

Although the research regarding gay men and intimate partner violence illuminates important findings, I have found no research that has examined the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given such, further study is warranted that could help understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative inquiry study was to understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who were in a same-sex relationship involving IPV within the past 5 years during the COVID-19 global pandemic. For purposes of this study, participants will be defined as men who have previously been in a romantic relationship with another man, self-identify as gay, and have experienced violent behavior from an intimate partner within the last 5 years.

Research Question

What are the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 global pandemic?

Theoretical Foundation

This study used a theoretical foundation to build upon the Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality approach for guidance and understanding of gay men's formal help-

seeking experiences during the COVID-19 global pandemic and after being in a same-sex intimate partner violence relationship within the last 5 years. Oliffe et al. (2014) mentioned that using an intersectional approach helped capture multiple dimensions that shaped experiences with IPV. This research examined intersecting structures such as gender discrimination and stigma towards victims of intimate partner violence. An intersectionality approach was important to help researchers understand the variations of one's experiences of victimization within the gay male community (Barnett, 2015). For example, Goldscheid (2014) described the need for an aggressive transformation within society about how gender violence is viewed in law, policy, and practice. For decades, the movement on violence against women seems to overshadow the growing amount of violence within the LGBTQ community and implies men are not victims of crimes. IPV reaches all sexes and relationships. Focusing solely on one specific gender identity (women) with IPV gives the false perception that men are not victims and excludes them from services and resources (Goldscheid, 2014). This framework helped understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and set a platform for reform with service and resource providers.

Nature of the Study

Generic Qualitative Inquiry

This study used a generic qualitative inquiry. This form of inquiry studies the subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on a subject's experiences of things in the outer world (Percy et al., 2015). This approach aimed to uncover individual

meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Kennedy, 2016). Generic qualitative approach helps researchers to understand how people interpret, construct, or make meaning of their world and experiences (Kahlke, 2014). A generic qualitative inquiry was selected to help understand the experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence. This study involved gathering data from interviews with gay men who were previously in an intimate partner same-sex relationship. Each participant identified being in a same-sex relationship and a victim of intimate partner violence within the last 5 years. Participants were not presently in an abusive relationship. Data collection consisted of 11 interviews with participants from multiple communities within the continental United States and venue-based establishments frequented by gay men. Data were analyzed using Dedoose software for coding, sub-coding, and theme analysis of interviews, audio, video, and verbal data gathered from the research.

Operational Definitions

Domestic violence: In the State of Michigan, domestic violence is defined as a pattern of learned behavior where a person uses physical, sexual, and emotional abuse to control another person (Michigan State Police, 2021). Barocas et al. (2016) described domestic violence as violence perpetrated between individuals with a family connection regardless of relationship but can include intimate partners.

Intimate partner violence: Intimate partner violence falls under the domestic violence laws in the State of Michigan and is defined as a dating relationship between individuals with a spouse or former spouse relationship, a child in common, resident, or

former resident of the same household, and in a dating relationship (Michigan Legislature, 2020). Goldenberg et al. (2016) defined intimate partner violence as violence perpetrated between individuals with an intimate partner relationship such as a spouse, former spouse, or dating relationship which includes a pattern of behavior whether physical, sexual, psychological, financial, and stalking. Furman et al. (2017) added to this definition coercive control to maintain power and control over another person.

Formal help-seeking: For purposes of this study formal help-seeking referred to participants seeking assistance from a human service provider (professional) such as a law enforcement officer, advocate and/or social worker, crisis counselors, IPV shelters, and health professionals (Lysova & Dim, 2020).

Intersectionality: Crenshaw (1989) describes intersectionality as a prism of looking at intersecting or overlapping identities to understand the inequalities against marginalized populations. O'Connor et al. (2019) describes intersectionality as multiple demographic categories to highlight theories of oppression, power imbalances, and disadvantages for marginalized populations.

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus (World Health Organization, 2021). The Center for Disease Control describes coronavirus as a disease being caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2 (Center for Disease Control, 2021). In 2019 the coronavirus, or COVID-19, was a diseased outbreak which originated in China, subsequently spread around the world, and in March 2020, was declared a pandemic by the World Health. Organization (Mayo Clinic, 2021).

Assumptions

It was the assumption that participants in this research would answer the interview questions with truthfulness, candidness, and accuracy. I also believed the participants of this study would have a genuine interest in the study and no other motives for cooperation. My selected sample size was enough to yield information-rich data. One final assumption was the researcher's field notes and observations were good given the unprecedented method (via Zoom) of data collection.

Scope and Delimitations

This research study focused on gay men over the age of 18 years who have experienced an intimate partner violence relationship within the last 5 years. The targeted sample size was 10-15 men who identified as being gay and resided in the Metropolitan Detroit, Michigan area. The primary method of data collection was interviews using Zoom Video Conference to explore and understand participants. Purposive sampling was used in this study as the researcher intentionally selected the participants who are knowledgeable of the phenomenon being studied and can help understand the phenomenon (Gill, 2020).

Limitations

As a precaution to the COVID 19 circumstances, I was unable to speak directly to potential participants face-to-face to introduce the study and used other forms such as flyers and email. During this unprecedented time of a global pandemic, restrictions, and lockdowns, limitations for this study included the lack of face-to-face contact between the researcher and the participant. Interviews were conducted via Zoom video conference

which made the environment less personal and immediate. As a result, I was unable to fully experience body language and nonverbal cues from the participants that may support an understanding of their experiences. Furthermore, this required participants to have access to a computer or comparable technology for an interview to take place. Another limitation to this study was the sample size and location restricted to an urban metropolitan geographic location.

Significance of the Study

Regardless of sexual orientation, victims of intimate partner violence deserve equal justice from system-based support organizations. Additionally, there is also a need for IPV organizations and the LGBTQ community to collaborate and improve inclusivity of all provided services (Furman et al., 2017). This study filled a gap in understanding the formal help-seeking experiences of gay males in a relationship involving IPV within the last 5 years during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The results of this study offer significant insight into understanding the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who are victims of intimate partner violence. Understanding these experiences aids professional practice in helping members of this group who sought justice and/or safety during a violent intimate partner relationship. Findings from this study may lead to a positive social change by encouraging more members within the gay men community to report abusive relationships and/or improve the human services response to the violent behavior.

Summary

Intimate partner violence is a crime which expands across all genders, cultures, race, and sexual orientation. Despite studies (Bacchus, et al, 2018; Freeland et al., 2018; Rollé et al, 2018) showing an equal or higher prevalence of violence in same-sex relationships, responses by law enforcement and other human service providers towards gay men who experience intimate partner violence lack services and resources (Durfee & Goodmark, 2020). This suggested a need to develop gender-sensitive services geared towards gay men. Barrett (2015) suggested although human service professionals receive education in treating those in the LGBTQ community, they are still unprepared in meeting their needs. One specific suggestion for further studies these authors mentioned was the implementation of comprehensive policies and procedures to reduce systemic barriers such as service provisions and staff training for gay men. Another suggestion for future studies included the pandemic's influence on IPV antecedents, risk factors, and strategies for increasing resources (Walsh et al., 2021). The authors' findings have implications for service providers for awareness, intervention, and prevention strategies. They suggested using gay men's participation in research initiatives to expand a broader and diverse sample in studies. This research intended to explore and understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence. Chapter 2 presented the literature review and articulated the generic qualitative inquiry research method for the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced IPV during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Intimate partner violence is a social problem for one in every four opposite-sex relationships, and one in every five same-sex relationships (Calton et al., 2016). Despite these estimated numbers, universal viewpoints on IPV have focused specifically on heterosexual relationships (Furman et al., 2017). Yet, there are unique circumstances that shape the experiences of same-sex couples and emphasize the necessity for tailored interventions to meet the needs of this population (Freeland et al., 2018). A review of the existing literature suggested that IPV among gay men is under-researched and consequently lacks consensus on important issues such as definition, scope, and severity (Goldenberg et al., 2016). Oliffe et al. (2014), mentioned macrosocial dynamics and a lack of intimate partner violence services for gay men is complex and contributes to the challenges gay men face seeking assistance for IPV. Furthermore, the constraints of stay at-home orders for COVID 19 affected IPV services for gay men, increased risks of violent behavior, and impacted access to services (Wood et al., 2021).

Chapter 2 was organized in multiple sections to discuss the overall dynamics of intimate partner violence as well as societal responses towards women and men and the marginalization of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence. I focused on the literature search strategies of key terms related to definitions of intimate partner violence, its history and evolution of laws among genders, an intersectionality

framework, social views and attitudes of IPV, IPV among gay men, and understanding formal help-seeking experiences of gay men involved in IPV. This chapter also discussed how the theoretical framework of intersectionality impacted gay men in an intimate partner violence relationship. There was also discussion on the social views and attitudes of heteronormativity, homophobia, and internalized homophobia, formal help-seeking experiences of lesbians and gay men, IPV laws, and law enforcement and sexual minorities, IPV and lesbian and gay populations, experiences of lesbians in abusive relationships, experiences of gay men in abusive relationships, informal help-seeking behaviors, help-seeking experiences of lesbians, help-seeking experiences of gay men, and services and resources for gay men who experience intimate partner violence.

Literature Search Strategy

My Literature Search Strategy included searching the Thoreau Multi-Database Search, SocINDEX with Full Text, PsycINFO, LGBT Life with Full Text, SAGE Research Methods, Google Scholar and its alerts, various databases within the Walden University Library system such as the AB/INFORM Collection, Taylor & Francis Online, ScienceDirect Subject Collections, Academic Search Complete, Criminal Justice Database, MEDLINE with Full Text, National Center for Health Statistics, SAGE Journals, and the World Wide Web. I conducted a search under the relevant academic journals which included *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, Culture, Health & Sexuality, Cultural Studies-Critical Methodologies, American Journal of Men's Health, Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, Journal of GLBT Family Studies, Social Epistemology, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International*

Journal, Journal of Family Theory and Review, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, Psychology & Sexuality, Journal of Family Violence, Social Science & Medicine, Sociology of Health & Illness, Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, Culture, Health & Sexuality, Partner Abuse, Multicultural Research of Intimate Partner Violence, Journal of Mixed Methods Research, Psychology of Violence, and Journal of Social Service Research. Within the various journals and the Thoreau Multi-Database Search, my key phrases were: *gay men, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, LGBTQ, partner abuse, feminist movement, law enforcement and IPV, battered women's movement, history of intimate partner violence, formal help-seeking, coercive control, intersectionality and theorists, intersectionality, social views, culture, gender, social laws, abusive relationships, Violence Against Women Act, Kimberlé Crenshaw, COVID-19, intimate partner violence laws, and definitions of intimate partner violence.*

To organize the literature, I used a literature review matrix outlining key article information and computerized filing based on relevance, author, publication date, method, journal, title of journal, database, and theorists. I used the same approach for each database while entering key terms and words. Major themes found in the literature included lack of definition of terms for same-sex couples in an intimate partner violence relationship, inadequate understanding of this population by professionals to offer tailored services and resources, lack of intimate partner violence laws to include members of this population and underreported or unreported cases because of these issues and fear of being *outed* to family and/or friends. The stigma of being a gay man along with

experiencing an abusive relationship contributes a great deal to discrimination against this population.

Theoretical Foundation: Intersectionality

The intersectionality concept was initially used to critically assess race and gender issues (Marfelt, 2016). Originally designed by Kimberlé Crenshaw during the 1980s to address misconceptions and social justice demands surrounding the Black woman and the law, intersectionality theory also applies to other races, gender, and sexual orientation (Rice et al., 2019). During its development, the intersectionality concept had a dominant focus on feminism practices. Furthermore, intersectionality within the last decade is considered feminism's most significant contribution to social research (Rice et al., 2019). With its roots in Black feminist thought, materialism, or structuralism (Rice et al., 2019), intersectionality helps place one's unique experiences into context (Furman et al., 2017). Although initially used as a concept to address discrimination against women of color, intersectionality is a concept where inequality should not be only understood by gender, race, or class (Windsong, 2018). Rooted in antidiscrimination law, Crenshaw (1989) believed an intersectional experience is greater than racism or sexism and if not considered, cannot sufficiently address the manner a group (i.e. Black women) is subordinated. Crenshaw (1989) stated the failure to address the complexities of "compoundness" (p. 140) is due to the influence of how one thinks about discrimination. Therefore, any analysis not considering intersectionality does not sufficiently address the marginalization of a subordinate population (Crenshaw, 1989).

Theoretical framework used to understand and translate one's experiences within a marginalized population must be rethought and recast (Crenshaw, 1989). The term "intersectional" itself was coined with a strong emergence in feminist circles in 1989 but developed and became a theory over 3 decades later. O'Connor et al. (2019) and Rice et al. (2019) described intersectionality to include multiple demographic categories and various social classes to highlight theories of oppression, shifts in power imbalances, and disadvantages. Scholars are now recognizing that characteristics such as gender, race, and class intersect and interlock with complex forms of inequality and social relationships (Windsong, 2018). Gkiouleka et al. (2018) suggested members of marginalized groups may experience trauma because of complex systems of power. Thus, an intersectional approach helps focus on scientific bias within dominant and excluded populations (Gkiouleka et al., 2018) as well as inform diversity studies and other social phenomena (Marfelt, 2016). During their continued research on intersectionality theory and methodologies, Rice et al. (2019) believed all social problems necessitate significant engagement with intersectionality.

With a foundation in antidiscrimination against Black women, intersectionality also reaches the gay male population as it relates to treatment and discrimination. In addition to obvious intersecting structures for IPV and same-sex couples, there are other structures such as classism, racism, and ableism which might intensify inequalities within the gay community (Barrett, 2015). Furthermore, these structures also exacerbate leverage and greater power and control perpetrators have over victims during an intimate

partner violence relationship such as threats to “out” a partner to family and friends (Barrett, 2015).

The purpose of an intersectionality framework is rooted in social justice and a move towards social transformation at the center of research (Rice et al., 2019). This framework conceptualizes the disadvantages of people from varying sources of oppression including but not limited to gender, race, and sexual orientation. Using an intersectionality approach is essential to recognize complex and multiple layers within the gay community along with placing value on characteristics like gender and sexual orientation (Furman et al., 2017). This present study explored the different experiences and identities of gay men in an intimate partner violence relationship for a greater understanding of stigmas such as being a gay man and a victim of intimate partner violence.

It is essential to recognize the complexity and multiple layers of the identity of those in the LGBTQ community while placing value on the intersectionality characteristics like gender identity and sexual orientation (Furman et al., 2017). Intersectionality is inclusive by design and focuses on how intersections along axes of identity reinforced marginalization (Al-Faham et al., 2019) (See Appendix A). Consequently, Barrett (2015) emphasized the importance of an intersectional framework to understanding the experiences of gay men in IPV situations. The intersectionality framework is a driving force of social justice and transformation. Using such a framework shows the need for additional research on social problems, such as IPV, intersectionality, and marginalized populations. A theoretical framework of

intersectionality was chosen for this study to explore and understand how the various identities and stigma of gay men affect their formal help-seeking experiences to intimate partner violence.

Intimate Partner Violence

Historically IPV studies focused on women in an intimate partner relationship being victimized by a male partner with little to no regard for victims of other genders or sexual orientations. Until about 1984, IPV was not always considered a crime in the United States but a private family matter where public servants such as advocates, and law enforcement did not intervene (Goodmark, 2017). In the United States today, IPV is considered a crime where the underlying principle is about power and control as well as multiple forms of physical and sexual violence regardless of gender or sexual orientation (World Health Organization, 2010). Albeit the focus historically has been with heterosexual relationships, research on coercive controlling behaviors with same-sex populations, specifically male same-sex, is increasing with the number of studies and complexity in the research (Raghavan et al., 2019). Furthermore, IPV was considered a private family matter with non-state intervention; however, once IPV was criminalized, the recognition of IPV shifted (Goodmark, 2017). Previously treated as a single category of experience, IPV now has a broad range of behaviors and research shows the impact of IPV is in large part because of the coercive control in a relationship (Dichter, et al., 2018). Scholars and advocates describe IPV as an expression of power and control (coercive control) over intimate partners (Hamberger et al., 2017).

Contemporary approaches to understanding IPV were heavily shaped by an increasing primacy towards coercive control versus acts of physical violence (Frankland & Brown, 2014). Although coercive control is on the rise in same-sex relationships (Dichter et al., 2018), according to Graham et al. (2019), members of same-sex relationships more frequently commit or experience IPV through physical injury versus coercive control. The experiences and needs of same-sex individuals in IPV relationships are different from those in opposite-sex relationships (Graham et al., 2019). Not all couples in IPV experience the same issues. Consequently, support strategies to meet the needs of those affected by IPV are paramount with ongoing research (Graham et al., 2019). When compared to IPV within heterosexual relationships, research on IPV among male same-sex relationships is far less known (Raghavan et al., 2019).

Definitions of Intimate Partner Violence

Most definitions of IPV include an intimate partner relationship between spouse, former spouse, and those in a dating relationship. Goldenberg et al. (2016) described IPV as interpersonal violence between partners using physical, sexual, psychological, financial, and stalking behaviors. Freeland et al. (2018) described IPV as violence between two individuals in an intimate physical sexual, emotional relationship where there is a presence of physical, sexual, emotional, or mental abuse. Furman et al. (2017) described IPV as a pattern of behavior where an intimate partner coerces, dominates, or isolates another intimate partner to maintain power and control in the relationship. Earlier definitions of IPV excluded coercive control but mentioned physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse between intimate partners (Graham et al., 2019).

Furman et al. (2017) also stated that for decades IPV was an issue framed solely for heterosexual and cisgender partnerships where the victim was a female, and the perpetrator was male. Current definitions of IPV now include coercive controlling behaviors as a key component and defining feature of IPV (Raghavan et al., 2019). From the research in this study, an IPV relationship was commonly referred to as a form of physical or sexual abuse one person has over an intimate partner regardless of gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Background on Intimate Partner Violence

The battered women's movement during the early 1970s contributed to raising awareness of intimate partner violence (Barrett, 2015). This movement helped shed light on IPV as a social issue jeopardizing equality, self-determination as well as dignity and worth of those victimized by the behavior (Barrett, 2015). In the late 1970s, psychologist Lenore Walker found victims of IPV suffered from a debilitating psychological syndrome ultimately termed Battered Women's Syndrome (Holloway & Wiener, 2018). This was a three-stage cycle of abuse forming low-level maltreatment, major abusive incidents, and expressions of remorse to create a cycle of abuse (Holloway & Wiener, 2018).

From this cycle of abuse, women would often feel a sense of forgiveness and not flee from an abusive relationship. From her research, Walker suggested this was a form of learned helplessness and could ultimately drive an abused woman to desperate and violent behavior against an assailant (Holloway & Weiner, 2018). Because of the feminist movement and rising crimes against women, the Federal Government enacted the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) to offer funding and technical support; thereby

making a shift in viewpoints of IPV being a public matter versus a family matter free of outside intervention (VAWA, 2019). Former domestic (intimate partner) laws only included women and did not use gender-neutral language (Guadalupe-Diaz & Yglesias, 2013). VAWA has evolved in its funding and goals to improve IPV for all communities and populations.

VAWA also transformed to protect and support same-gender couples by enforcing new laws and provisions within the gay and lesbian communities for improved services and resources (Guadalupe-Diaz & Yglesias, 2013). Presently, there is a new version of the VAWA which protects all victims of IPV (Russell et al., 2015). Under the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, as outlined by the Library of Congress (2013), a definition of IPV now expands to read:

Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 - (Sec. 3) Amends the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) to add or expand definitions of several terms used in such Act, including : (1) "culturally specific services" to mean community-based services that offer culturally relevant and linguistically specific services and resources to culturally specific communities; (2) "personally identifying information or personal information" with respect to a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking; (3) "underserved populations" as populations that face barriers in accessing and using victim services because of geographic location, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity; and (4) "youth" to mean a person who is 11 to 24 years old.

The VAWA Reauthorization Act of 2013 covers those community-based services and underserved populations (Library of Congress, 2019). Efforts to enhance data collection and new approaches for law enforcement when interacting with victims present essential issues for VAWA (Congressional Research Service, 2018).

IPV and Sexual Minorities

Existing research on intimate partner violence among sexual minorities, including women and men, suggests a greater prevalence of violence in heterosexual relationships and received heavy criticism because the studies rely on assumptions of male against female violence and ignore same-sex IPV (Chen et al., 2020; Steele et al., 2020). However, sexual minorities experience IPV at equal or greater rates than their heterosexual counterparts but there is less research on the effects of violence on sexual minorities (Chen et al., 2020). Knowledge and resources for sexual minority men who experience IPV and those in a same-sex relationship are scarce, literature on coping mechanisms used by sexual minorities is almost nonexistent (Goldberg-Looney et al., 2016). Consequently, sexual minority men are overlooked in gender and sexual orientation (Goldberg-Looney et al., 2016). Despite similarities of IPV between heterosexual and sexual minorities, members of the latter population experience unique factors associated with sexual minorities (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017).

Internal and external sources of stress among sexual minorities affect intimate partner violence relationships. These factors include but are not limited to fear of *outness* and *closetedness*, perceived discrimination, stigma consciousness, and internalized homophobia (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017). External stressors for sexual

minorities are described as experiences with violence, discrimination, and harassment in daily life (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017). Within the last decade, IPV among sexual minorities remains a problem today and is just as common in heterosexual couples yet less than half of IPV incidents among sexual minorities are reported to the police (Franklin et al., 2019).

Contemporary Issues in IPV

For decades IPV was viewed as a heterosexual issue with a male perpetrator and female victim and as a universal experience of violence against women (Furman et al., 2017). Furthermore, Furman et al. (2017) reported recent literature contests, with evidence; IPV is not specific to any gender, marital status, cohabitation, sexual orientation, or other perceived factors. Nonetheless, understanding IPV has evolved throughout time. Professionals and researchers have made great strides in understanding the dynamics of IPV. Considering culture and norms within society is paramount to understanding contemporary issues in IPV. Due to a lack of current data on cultural and social norms concerning violent behavior, The World Health Organization (2009) believed cultural and social norms influence behavior including violent behavior.

Cultural and Social Views and Attitudes

Cultural and social beliefs help shape the attitudes and behaviors of individuals and groups. Going a step further, these attitudes and behaviors can potentially encourage violence (World Health Organization, 2009). Binary categories (i.e. male and female) were initially used to conceptualize IPV (Yerke & DeFeo, 2016). This conceptualization of IPV excluded members from the queer and transgender populations. Consequently,

services, resources, and barriers are scarce to none for members of the queer and transgender communities. Approximately 37% of adults who identify with the LGBTQ population have children (Few-Demo et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies (Few-Demo et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2014;) indicate children raised in same-sex households and children raised in different-sex households fare equally well. As a result of the growing LGBTQ parent families, society's views, or lack thereof, indicate greater to include these families in our understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity to become competent and caring human services professionals (Few-Demo et al., 2016). Although IPV is recognized as a global health concern, the literature on IPV takes a heteronormative approach and emphasizes sexual orientation versus gender identity (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016). Traditional beliefs in gender roles play a significant part in social and cultural views. IPV among gay men is perceived as less serious than their heterosexual counterparts (Russell et al., 2015).

It is a common belief that some feel IPV consists of a female victim and male perpetrator; thereby leaving the gay man, and members of the LGBTQ community, with no voice or language to articulate their experiences (Bacchus et al., 2018). Consequently, this feeling was described by other researchers as the powerful role of the public story about domestic violence marginalizing people who are not female victims and in a relationship with a male partner (Bacchus et al., 2018). IPV was once viewed as a private family matter between a man and woman; now it crosses all genders and sexual orientations and is considered a public health issue as well as a crime in many countries.

As a result of such, society needs to have tailored responses to those subgroups which includes gay men (World Health Organization, 2010).

As mentioned above, members of the LGBTQ community experience IPV at higher rates than heterosexual individuals. Despite the higher rates, there is little structural support for LGBTQ, non-heterosexual, and noncisgender people (Coston, 2019; Furman et al., 2017). Stigmas such as homophobia, transphobia, and racism are contributing factors that affect levels of awareness towards sexual violence (Coston, 2019). As a result, human service providers such as law enforcement, legal services, crisis lines, clergy, domestic violence agencies, and shelters are not utilized by members of the LGBTQ community (Coston, 2019). Familial views towards LGBTQ people lack understanding, are estranged, and do not provide sufficient social support (Barrett & Sheridan, 2017).

Contemporary Laws on IPV

Federal laws such as the VAWA and the Gun Control Act directly impact IPV. VAWA protects victims of intimate partner violence regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity while providing funding to service providers to support victims (VAWA, 2018). The Gun Control Act prohibits the purchase of firearms for anyone with an IPV conviction (VAWA, 2018). Under both laws, it is a federal crime to possess a firearm once convicted of IPV (Diez et al., 2017). IPV laws vary from state to state; however, IPV is a crime in the United States of America. Approximately 30 states within the United States have IPV laws that use gender-neutral language and includes same-sex relationships (Guadalupe-Diaz & Yglesias, 2013). Nonetheless, members of the gay

community are still unaware of these laws and hold negative viewpoints towards public servants and human service providers (Barrett, 2015). Systemic inequities such as the justice system, law enforcement, prosecutors, and emergency shelters/advocates have played a role in the feelings of gay men towards institutional help (Calton et al., 2016).

Law Enforcement and Sexual Minorities

Historically, law enforcement interaction with members from sexual minority groups has been volatile and accusatory of police brutality (Satuluri & Nadel, 2018). Discrimination factors by law enforcement include being either passive or aggressive in misconduct, profiling, maltreatment in detention centers, inappropriate searches, and dismissing anti-hate crimes as a fault of the victim were described as some police actions towards sexual minorities (Satuluri & Nadel, 2018). Despite the few studies on diversity training for law enforcement, the benefits of training this group of people to interact with members of sexual minority groups are described as working together with the community to address barriers like crime reporting, and biased or hostile treatment (Israel et al., 2017).

Laws on IPV, professional responses to victim services, and widespread policy changes have helped enhance law enforcement reactions to IPV and victim safety (Russell & Sturgeon, 2018). Law enforcement officers, for example, may extend reactionary services to IPV victims through services and resources, training, victim assessment, and assistance and referrals (Russell & Sturgeon, 2018). Traditionally, IPV was not addressed by law enforcement and viewed as a private family matter; however societal views have shifted and now include academic research, social policies, and

protections for sexual minorities (Russell & Sturgeon, 2018). Contemporarily, law enforcement takes more of a reactive versus proactive approach to addressing IPV. Once viewed as a heterosexual issue, a shift in societal views sparked academic research, social policies, and protection for sexual minorities affected by IPV (Russell & Sturgeon, 2018). However, there remains a modicum of training of law enforcement to address the needs of members from the LGBTQ community, specifically gay men.

IPV and Lesbian and Gay Populations

Gender and heterosexuality were first used to conceptualize IPV (Yerke & DeFeo, 2016). Existing research shows a higher prevalence of IPV within the gay male community when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Bacchus et al., 2018; Freeland et al., 2018; Russell & Sturgeon, 2018;). Additionally, IPV among the lesbian community also has a higher rate of IPV over the general population (Brown & Herman, 2015). Furthermore, approximately 1.5 million women and over 835,000 men are victims of IPV (Russell & Sturgeon, 2018). In comparison to heterosexual women, lesbians experienced more IPV (Chen et al., 2020). The Center for Disease Control found that members who were considered sexual minorities reported rates of IPV greater than or equal to sexual majorities (Center for Disease Control, 2013). There is a high prevalence of IPV within the gay community (Bacchus et al., 2018; Calton et al., 2016; Raghavan, et al., 2019). Nonetheless, networking, health care, educational, and law enforcement professionals still struggle with providing services and resources to gay men who are victims of IPV (Coston, 2019; Russell & Sturgeon, 2018). In comparison to research with

a focus on male perpetrators and female victims of IPV, studies on same-sex (gay men) continue to be under-researched (Stephenson & Finneran, 2017).

Experiences of Lesbians in Abusive Relationships

Heterosexism and societal homophobia are common factors of same-sex victims of IPV and one reason members in same-sex relationships have different experiences than heterosexual couples (Gehring & Vaske, 2017). Violence related perceptions of men and women vary and can impact society's expectations (Wasarhaley et al., 2017). Studies on intimate partner violence within lesbian communities have focused on the obstacles and circumstances lesbians may face which are unique to sexual minorities (Gehring & Vaske, 2017). Lesbians in abusive relationships can also experience isolation and financial challenges. Money and the fear of being disconnected from family, friends, and society present issues for lesbians leaving an abusive partner and seeking resources (Brown & Herman, 2015).

Some domestic violence service providers believe that women cannot hurt other women which have consequences on how members of the criminal justice system respond and understand lesbian IPV and their willingness to seek formal help (Wasarhaley et al., 2017). Furthermore, even if domestic violence shelters are available for lesbians, they mainly are housed by heterosexual women, lack necessary services, and may send some a sense of fear their abusive partners may also access the shelter (Brown & Herman, 2015). Despite lesbians' hesitancy to enter a domestic violence shelter, members of this population become residents of the shelter when compared to gay men in abusive relationships.

Experiences of Gay Men in Abusive Relationships

Intimate partner violence among gay men is unique and comes with its own set of circumstances. Signs of mistrust, stigma, and anticipation of abuse within this community are common (Russel & Sturgeon, 2018). These signs contribute to gay men being hesitant to disclose IPV for reasons such as threats of being "outed", along with homophobia by an abusive partner and internalized homophobia towards themselves. Homophobia is described as the negative social attitude towards homosexuals (Smallwood et al., 2017). Additionally, when a gay man has a negative social attitude about oneself some refer to this feeling as internalized homophobia which may potentially affect health outcomes like depression or drug use (Moody et al., 2018). Internalized homophobia is an inward disdain or fear of one's same-sex attraction and can include global anti-gay attitudes, isolation from other sexual minority groups, and discomfort with sexual identity disclosure (Moody et al., 2018).

Gay men who are victims of IPV and have a fear of "coming out" to family, friends, and co-workers are often manipulated by an abusive partner, discouraging them from seeking professional help, social support from family, friends, or involving the police (Furman et al., 2017). Victims of IPV are fearful and ashamed to share their experiences for possible rejection from their communities. This feeling of fear and shame is rooted in wanting to protect the gay community from further stereotyping (Furman et al., 2017). Regardless of this fear and shame, some gay men will seek formal help and involve law enforcement when they have experienced IPV while others will find support from other informal sources.

Informal Help-Seeking Behaviors

Help-seeking behavior is dichotomized as either formal or informal (Cho et al., 2020). Informal help-seeking consists of reaching out to one's family, friends, clergy, and even neighbors as result of historical events, discriminatory practices, and mistrust of formal institutions (Lacey et al., 2021). It is estimated approximately 75% of those who suffer from IPV over time seek informal help (Voth Schrag et al., 2020). Many survivors of intimate partner violence do not seek critically needed help from an abusive relationship because of factors like sociodemographic characteristics and the nature of IPV (Cho et al., 2020). Deciding to seek informal or formal help from an IPV relationship is challenging, varies from individual to individual, and has positive and negative experiences regardless of sexual orientation or gender (Voth Schrag, 2020).

Help-Seeking Experiences of Heterosexuals

Help-seeking strategies of those who experience IPV are dichotomized as either informal or formal sources of help (Cheng et al., 2020). Victims and survivors who experience IPV face challenges when seeking formal help from critical resources such as health care, community agencies, or the criminal justice system (Robinson et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding barriers which hinder those who suffer IPV from seeking help is important and helps service providers develop resources for them (Robinson et al., 2020). Seeking positive formal help greatly impacts recovery and safety of those experiencing IPV (Wright et al., 2021). For women in a heterosexual relationship the decision to seek help and leave an abusive relationship is a process and shaped by individual, familial, and sociocultural factors (Barrios et al., 2020).

When a woman in an IPV relationship has made the decision to seek formal help the situation is severe or life-threatening (Harper, 2021). Many women who experience IPV seek help and ways to leave an abusive relationship but strategies for doing so vary greatly (Barrios et al., 2020). Financial concerns, institutional challenges from professional service providers (i.e. distrust in law enforcement), stigma and priorities impact help-seeking behaviors (Cheng et al., 2020). Formal services such as protection orders, counseling services, medical, legal, and social services are often sought by women in IPV relationships (Cheng et al., 2020). Heterosexual men also experience IPV, yet their needs are comparatively neglected, viewed as less than masculine, they fear losing relationships with their children, put their female partner's needs over their own, and most believe many professional services generalize them as the perpetrator (Huntley et al., 2019). The above characteristics impact how and why heterosexuals seek professional services when in an abusive relationship.

Help-Seeking Experiences of Lesbians

The bulk of research on barriers to help-seeking in IPV relationships have focused on women in same-sex relationships (Robinson, et al., 2020). Lesbians in abusive relationships will consider how their relationships will be viewed by outsiders prior to making decisions to seek help (Donovan & Barnes, 2020). Reasons for lesbians not willing to immediately seek help from an abusive relationship includes fear of societal heterosexist views, threats of being "outted" to family, employers, landlords, as well as the loss of a job, home, and/or children (Battista et al., 2021). Furthermore, intimate partner violence shelters have not provided services or resources for lesbians or any

member of the LGBTQ community and none are dedicated to serving lesbians (Calton et al., 2016). Even with the current VAWA laws to protect members of the LGBTQ community, lesbians are hesitant to seek help from intimate partner violence for fear of not being taken seriously by staff, rejection by other residents, and fear an abusive partner would have access to the shelter (Calton et al., 2016). A survivor's decision to seek help from an abusive relationship varies and is influenced by individual, sociocultural, and interpersonal factors (Robinson et al., 2020).

Help-Seeking Experiences of Gay Men

Making the decision to seek help is a complex and iterative process and requires a positive encounter with sources of professional help such as health professionals and the criminal justice system (Calton et al., 2016). Victim services for gay men in an abusive relationship is described as invisible because the men were either unaware of the services or did not perceive them as appropriate (Huntley et al., 2019). Gay men are less likely to disclose abuse but seek informal help from friends because of stigma, perception of sexual minorities and inappropriate services (Bacchus et al., 2016; Freeland et al., 2018).

There is higher prevalence of IPV among gay men and other members of the LGBTQ community and they face many significant barriers to seeking help (Calton et al., 2016). Yet, same-sex IPV programs in the United States mirrored or were connected to those programs established for heterosexuals and did not address the specific needs of gay men (Rollé et al., 2018). For reasons such as a fear of homophobia and inappropriate responses to services, gay men are hesitant to seek formal help (Bacchus et al., 2018).

Resources such as emergency responses, shelters, and agencies have failed in an adequate response to gay men and IPV (Rollé et al., 2018).

Services and Resources for Gay Men who Experience Intimate Partner Violence

Historically, laws and social service programs were developed to assist women who experienced IPV, specifically. Majority of past and current research on IPV has focused on female heterosexual victims (Gehring & Vaske 2017). A narrow understanding of IPV in heteronormative gender-based relationships fosters challenges for members of the LGBTQ community seeking to define their experiences (Coston, 2019). How a woman in an abusive relationship understands their experience will determine where and from whom services are sought (Morgan et al., 2016). One specific service is found in domestic violence shelters. Research shows domestic violence and emergency shelters are found to address the needs of women and children (Fisher & Stylianou, 2019); thereby sending the signal there is a lack of services and resources available for those who do not meet such criteria. Additionally, lesbians may or may not take advantage of a domestic violence shelter dependent upon their belief if the shelters are helpful (Brown & Herman, 2015). Gay men find it challenging to stay at shelters because of programs and services being geared towards women (Brown & Herman, 2015). Although offering services to address issues like safety, housing, legal or mental assistance for anyone who experiences intimate partner violence seems universal, members of the LGBTQ community require unique resources that require specialized training of service providers to address their needs.

For lesbians and gay men survivors' cultural ideologies regarding femininity and masculinity may perpetuate backlash or deter victims from discussing their experiences with service providers (Barrett, 2015). Most discussions of the causes, consequences, and solutions to IPV center around a heteronormative approach which can potentially lead advocates and professionals with a feeling of a lack of preparedness and knowledge about the gay population (Coston, 2019). Gay men who experience intimate partner violence do not have enough services and resources tailored to meet their unique needs and consequently relying on informal sources of support (Freeland et al., 2018). Sexual minorities such as gay men are at an increase for IPV because of experiencing heterosexist discrimination and violence (Sutter et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is theorized this maltreatment towards gay men is a result of heterosexism, which is an institutionally reinforced society wide preference of heterosexual people over members from the LGBTQ community (Sutter et al., 2019). Coston (2019) asserted despite the alarming percentage of higher IPV prevalence among gay men over heterosexual women, there is little formal or structural support for gay survivors.

Bacchus et al. (2018) used the term domestic violence and abuse interchangeably with intimate partner violence but stated this behavior is also highly prevalent among gay men when compared to heterosexuals. It is important for gay men to feel comfortable in coming forward to professionals when experiencing intimate partner violence. However, gay men are hesitant to seek services and resources because of inappropriate responses by providers (Bacchus, et al., 2018). Stigmatization plays a dual role in being gay as well as being a victim of IPV. Historically, theoretical frameworks with a focus on feminism

have excluded members from the gay men community to have a voice or language to articulate their experiences with IPV (Bacchus et al., 2018).

Summary and Conclusion

Throughout history, research on intimate partner violence (IPV) between heterosexual couples has outweighed studies on IPV among members of the LGBTQ community. Despite some studies showing greater prevalence in same-sex relationships, few still show the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who are in IPV relationships. The literature identified some of the unique experiences of gay men to include fear and shame and misunderstandings. These unique circumstances are contributing factors in the significance of human service providers understanding gay men's experiences with IPV as well as some challenges with developing interventions. By using an intersectionality framework for my present research, I explored the experiences and identities of gay men in intimate partner violence relationships who may be impacted by the stigma of being a gay man along with a victim of intimate partner violence. In Chapter 3, I discussed a generic qualitative inquiry for carrying out my study. After an agreement with local community agencies, I used a demographic questionnaire for participates of this study before interviewing volunteers from the gay man population.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

IPV among gay men often has higher prevalence rates than their heterosexual counterparts (Baccus et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2019). Unique circumstances such as stigma, perceived discrimination, and internalized homophobia (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017) for members of the LGBTQI community in general, and gay men specifically, have influenced the responses and appropriate services by professionals. These responses and services are necessary to support victims of IPV within this population (Gehring & Vaske, 2017). Consequently, gay victims may experience maladaptive outcomes because of homophobia and a lack of appropriately tailored services (Gehring & Vaske, 2017). Understanding the multiple risk factors like internalized homophobia, stigma, and discrimination against gay men is essential to address intervention and prevention services as well as resources for sexual minorities (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017). To aid in this study, I selected a generic qualitative inquiry to understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay in an intimate partner violence relationship. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who were in a same-sex relationship involving IPV within the past 5 years during the COVID-19 pandemic. Generic qualitative inquiry uses a subjective approach and investigates people's opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences (Percy et al., 2015). In Chapter 3, I focused on the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and research methodology. Furthermore, I discussed instrumentation, data collection, data analysis,

trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The guiding research question for this study was:

> Qualitative: What are the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 global pandemic?

The research question was developed to address the larger concept of intimate partner violence. The interview questions were used to help understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence since entering the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Qualitative Research

House (2018) delineates the difference in using a qualitative method versus a quantitative method as understanding human behavior over-explaining human behavior. A qualitative approach generally asks the "why" question and the quantitative approach asks the "what" question (Barnham, 2015). Busetto et al. (2020) described qualitative inquiries to include data from words versus numbers. Qualitative research design focuses on an understanding of a phenomenon of interest from the lens of those being studied (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Researchers who use qualitative designs are interested in the ways in which people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and what meanings attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using a qualitative approach allows the researcher an opportunity to advance and apply their interpersonal and subjectivity skills to a research exploratory process (Alase, 2017). Qualitative

research has various approaches such as grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology which are considered ‘established’ methodologies; however, there are studies not bound by these methodologies known as generic qualitative approaches (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014).

Generic Qualitative Inquiry

Although a generic qualitative inquiry is similar in nature to a phenomenological approach, generic qualitative inquiry is intended to investigate a person’s opinions, attitudes, and reflections on their experiences of the outer world (Percy et al., 2015). Kahlke (2014) also suggested that generic qualitative inquiry focuses on the perspectives, attitudes, and opinions of specific issues. Generic qualitative inquiry has two subcategories known as interpretive description and qualitative description (Kahlke, 2014).

Interpretive Description and Qualitative Description

In interpretive description the knowledge is not absolute but socially constructed through the subjective person’s experiences while qualitative description research is designed to produce low-inference description of a phenomenon (Kahlke, 2014). Interpretive description seeks to understand phenomena that illuminates the characteristics, patterns, and structure in theoretically useful manners (Kahlke, 2014). A key element of qualitative descriptive design is to minimize inferences made so that the research remains “closer” to the original data (Sandelowski, 2010). Using a qualitative design, the researcher can interpret the social world of research participants by focusing

on experiences, perspectives, and histories (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009) but it is the participant who describes the experience.

To understand the experiences of a phenomenon without interpretation or judgment, I chose to use a qualitative description inquiry for this research. Using a generic qualitative approach is suggested when a researcher has a prior knowledge or pre-understanding of the phenomenon (Percy et al., 2015). The goal of this study was to understand the experience rather than explain the experience by having the participants share their experiences in their own words.

As mentioned, to understand the phenomenon of formal help-seeking experiences, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of gay men in intimate partner violence relationships; therefore, a qualitative method of study was the appropriate choice. A quantitative study uses numbers and pre-determined numbers (Aspers & Corte, 2019) and will not allow participants to share their experiences in their own words and/or thoughts. Therefore, I used a generic qualitative inquiry with a qualitative descriptive design.

My rationale for using a generic qualitative methodology was motived by the passion to understand the experiences of professional help-seeking experiences of gay men in an intimate partner violence relationship. Using a generic qualitative approach, I wanted to explore the stigmas and challenges gay men face because of intimate partner violence. Finally, I sought to describe the impact intersectionality traits like gender identity and sexual orientation had on gay men and intimate partner violence. I chose this methodology and a qualitative description approach to help concentrate on the experience

of the participant rather than an interpretation of the researcher's experience (Moustakas, 1994). This study aimed to understand the experiences of its participants. Therefore, using participants who have experienced a phenomenon rather than an interpretation of the events or focus on a single event was best suited for this study.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher and the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Karagiozis, 2018), it was my role to minimize and disclose personal assumptions and biases during data collection, coding, and sorting (Clark & Vealé, 2018). It is the role of the researcher in qualitative studies to be participatory yet unbiased (Clark & Vealé 2018). Researchers may face personal challenges during a study but should find ways to control for biases. Epoche and bracketing concepts are essential in qualitative research and help researchers control for bias. According to Moustakas (1994), epoche occurs when a researcher explores his or her own experiences of personal prejudices and assumptions and brackets or sets asides them during a study. Bracketing is extremely important in qualitative studies to ensure the participants' perceptions remain intact (Burkholder et al., 2019), despite the belief that some researchers are not able to bracket, or set aside, personal values and knowledge (Caelli et al., 2003). There are some, however, who see bracketing as a way for the researcher to manage assumptions and presuppositions (Caelli et al., 2003). As a researcher, the primary role in a study is to gather, organize, and analyze perceptions of those who have experienced a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2019).

As the primary researcher for this generic qualitative study, it was important for me to be cognizant of any potential biases and how those affected the study. To build trust, leading questions, facial expressions, and gestures should be avoided when observing or interviewing participants (Burkholder et al., 2019). Building a solid rapport and trust with research participants is important because it is not uncommon for qualitative researchers to have a compelling interest, related experiences, and build bonds on relatable aspects of social identities and experiences (Bush & Amechi, 2019). As a human service provider in law enforcement whose primary function is to address intimate partner violence, it is essential to demonstrate courtesy, listening, and sensitivity to participants' concerns as well as have a reflexive attitude (O'Grady, 2016). The role of an observer of qualitative research is to focus on the points of view of the participant (Graue, 2016). Researchers must listen and observe with minimal intervention while making certain the participants remain on the topic (Yates & Leggett, 2016).

Researcher Bias

I have over two decades of experience as a law enforcement officer. For thirteen of those years, my role was as a supervisor within the specialized unit of domestic violence addressing intimate partner violence. Survivors of IPV and those who report the abuse within my jurisdiction received services and resources without any respect for person, gender, or sexual orientation. Research bias plays an important role for the researcher. It is paramount researchers are aware that reflectivity can influence decisions and actions and biases and ethical considerations should be addressed during the early stages of research (Johnson et al., 2020). Working in a professional environment as a law

enforcement officer, my training included making unbiased decisions along with equal and fair treatment regardless of personal beliefs. Critical reflectivity requires the researcher to position his or her involvement, position, beliefs, and assumptions about the studies embedded discourses; thereby extending the researcher to see beyond the unthinkable and understand how biases may influence the presentation of participants' experiences (Wadams & Park, 2018).

To manage research biases, I used open-ended questions that allowed the participant to share responses without being led or judged. Understanding the uniqueness of intimate partner violence and how many factors might contribute to a response, it was a personal goal to be cognizant of any preconceived perceptions based on my professional experiences. Working with survivors of IPV has the potential for revelation of sensitive information, the researcher must take necessary precautions to minimize intrusions into the autonomy of the participants (Sanjari et al., 2014). Participants in this research did not present any conflict of interest nor did they have a relationship with the researcher that fostered any bias on the study. The laws in my state do not require mandatory reporting on intimate partner violence by law enforcement officers, and although I have had contact with survivors of IPV, not much contact was with a significant number of gay men.

Methodology

Participants

The purpose of this study was to understand the formal (professional) help-seeking experiences of gay men in an intimate partner violence relationship. Participants

for this study were drawn from a pool of men who were over 18 years of age, identified as gay, resided in the continental United States, have experienced intimate partner violence within the last 5 years, and began seeking help prior to the start of COVID-19. Participants also had at least one formal encounter with a law enforcement officer, had access to the Internet, possessed a valid email account, and volunteered to be a part of the study. My participants were from various states within the continental United States. I selected this population because of the lack of services and resources provided by trained professionals (Rollé et al., 2018) for gay men. Specifically, in Michigan, approximately 88% of members of the LGBTQ community feel more comfortable with services if more professionals were trained in meeting their needs (Michigan Health Endowment Fund, 2018) when they experience intimate partner violence. My geographic location was originally an urban city in Southeastern Michigan but changed to the continental United States once I implemented the start of my study.

As previously stated, IPV prevalence rates for gay men are found to be higher than their heterosexual counterparts (Chen et al., 2020; Coston, 2019; Gehring & Vaske, 2017). Furthermore, I believed a deeper understanding of the experiences of gay men in IPV relationships would yield greater social change for marginalized populations.
I used purposeful sampling to conduct this research. Using purposeful sampling in a qualitative study is one way to manage data as too much data in qualitative research may potentially undermine to perform a thorough analysis (Ames et al., 2019). Purposeful sampling is used when the researcher seeks to obtain information-rich data from

individuals who are especially knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Participants in this study were selected based on the criteria of identifying as a gay man who experienced intimate partner violence in a relationship within the last 5 years. Participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire to determine eligibility for the study (Appendix B). A small monetary incentive in the form of a gift card was given to participants who volunteered to be a part of the study and an informed consent was also used as outlined with the Walden University IRB process (IRB approval number 11-17-21-0181907).

Saturation and Sample Size

Data saturation is the measuring tool researchers use for estimating and assessing qualitative sample sizes (Guest et al., 2020). Although the method for achieving saturation is scarce (Constantinou et al., 2017), there is no definite number for participants in a qualitative study and estimating numbers to reach saturation is dependent upon a multitude of factors (Morse, 2015). It is paramount to have enough data. Alase (2017) recommends 5-10 interviews with those who have experienced similar events for a phenomenological study. Others suggest 20 to 30 but less than 50 participants for qualitative studies (van Rijnsoever, 2017) and some researchers argue for 5-25 interviews for saturation (Constantinou et al., 2017). Determining how many participants to use in a study is based on the saturation point (Tran et al., 2016).

Sample size in a qualitative study is challenging but using an indication from evidence in previous research a range in the sample size may be useful (Blaikie, 2018).

Furman et al. (2017) used a sample of 10 participants in semi-structured interviews for a qualitative study. I intended to use 10-15 participants for my research. My rationale for was based on the rigorous recruitment of participants and an overestimation of participants to factor in unforeseen circumstances (Morse, 2015). This sample size was a start to determining data saturation. Tran et al. (2016) described data saturation as the point in data collection and analysis where any new information produces little to no new information to the study. Saturation is a significant component of rigor (Guest et al., 2020). Too few participants risk adequate depth and breadth and premature interpretation of a study (Saunders et al., 2018) while too many potentially produce superficial volumes of data and not necessarily enough for effective data saturation (Cleary et al., 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015). I intended to have a pool of participants beyond 10 to factor in room for potential issues such as saturation or not enough participants.

Instrumentation

I used semi structured interviews with open-ended questions to study the experiences of each participant's involvement with intimate partner violence (See Appendix C). Participants were asked about their experiences with law enforcement officers and other human service professionals while experiencing intimate partner violence. An effective interview protocol should begin with a brief social conversation to create a relaxed and trusting atmosphere (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews provide the researcher with rich and detailed data to help understand the participants' experiences, description and meaning of those experiences (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). As part of the interview protocol, the interviewer must maintain control of the questions, evaluate the

answers, probe for more meaningful answers, if necessary, while building a positive relationship (van de Wiel, 2017).

Interviewing is the heart of qualitative work and virtual interviews via the Internet have taken a new tone by affording opportunities for interviews without travel or being physically present (Janesick, 2016). I conducted and recorded interviews via Zoom meetings. In addition to the video recorder embedded in Zoom, I used a digital voice recorder as a backup. In addition to the digital recordings, I took brief field notes to help recall important aspects of the interview for a detailed field on the interaction at a later point (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Field notes complement recorded interviews and can provide important context to interview interpretation (Sutton & Austin, 2015). In addition to recording interviews, I took brief field notes on the participants' gestures and body language as a back-up to the recording.

Data Collection Strategies

Procedures for Recruitment

As a precaution to COVID 19 circumstances, my procedures for recruitment included designing and emailing a flyer (See Appendix D) for distribution at frequented venues which requested an email or phone call response from potential participants who agreed to volunteer for my research. From my professional network, a liaison between the law enforcement department and members of the LGBTQ community, I obtained details on venues frequented by gay men. Additionally, I used various social media outlets (i.e. Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn) for participant recruitment. For this study,

the data collection process began with the email or phone call responses from volunteers who accepted the invitation to participate in the study.

Participant Selection

Once I received the volunteers' interests, I followed up with an email to confirm acceptance, contacted them via telephone, discussed research criteria (See Appendix E), confirmed eligibility, and sent a brief demographics questionnaire to gather baseline demographic information. Once I collected this information from participants, I explained and emailed the informed consent, research process, and set up the date and time for interviewing via Zoom. Copies of the interview questions were given to each participant 2 days before to the interviewee for an opportunity to decide if they wished to participate in the study.

Upon completion of the interview, participants asked questions concerning the next steps and phase of the research as well as discussed debriefing strategies from the study. Debriefings are essential supplements to qualitative interviews (McMahon & Winch, 2018). Each participant was given a debriefing statement form (See Appendix F) thanking each for sharing their stories, along with reminders of the type of study conducted, informed consent, and having the option to pull out of the process at any time. I followed up with a telephone call or email approximately 7 days after the interview in case the participant had questions, wished to clarify statements from the original interview, or any post-interview follow-up questions, if necessary.

Data Management and Analysis Strategies

Qualitative studies generate large amounts of data from the onset of research (Sutton & Austin, 2015). From the transcriptions, the researcher should sift through the raw data of information while identifying significant patterns and developing the essence of what the data reveals (Cypress, 2019). This process is a part of coding or telling the "story" to reduce large amounts of material into readily accessible data for analysis (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Data analysis in qualitative studies is often inductive allowing meanings to emerge from the data that is subsequently coded (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Themes develop from coding and present the data in a coherent and meaningful way (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Using a thematic analysis was most appropriate for this study as this analysis closely examines text from interviews field notes, documents, applies codes, and develops themes (Staller, 2012). After the data is coded and placed in themes, the researcher interprets the data in attempt to make sense, explain results and draw conclusions. Cypress (2018) outlined steps of data analysis to include organization, reading, coding, and organizing themes, representing, and interpreting data.

First Step: Organization

Having a filing system makes it easier for future data retrieval and protecting confidentiality (Cypress, 2018). For this study, my data management began with the recording of interviews and securing each participant's interview in a password protected folder and external drive. Each participant was given a unique personal identification number (PIN) to maintain confidentiality. The folders were labeled using the respective PINs. A file naming system was used to archive raw data before coding. Throughout the

research process, organization was maintained using the filing system for each step (i.e. coding, themes, interpreting).

Second Step: Review and Explore Data

Data management and analysis for interviews require multiple steps once the interview is completed. Data should be transcribed into protocols and transcripts (Busetto et al., 2020). Transcribing interviews verbatim is typical in qualitative studies, usually done before analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015), and allows for a replay of exact words of participants during the analysis (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). A review of the interview videos, observations, notes, and other documents attentively and carefully listening for meticulous information (Parameswaran et al., 2020) will set the groundwork for coding and theming.

Third Step: Initial Coding and Organizing Themes

This study used a coding process of descriptive, interpretative, and pattern coding. From my recorded interviews and field notes, I transcribed each participant's responses verbatim into a word document using the dictate feature. Once the transcription was complete, I began using the three-step coding process of descriptive, interpretive, and pattern coding. During descriptive coding, a segment of data/text is considered for the first time in an analysis (Silver & Lewins, 2017). This phase consisted of highlighting key words and phrases, making margin notes, and categorizing the data. Interpretive coding is more detailed than descriptive coding where existing concepts and themes are analyzed for detailed aspects (Silver & Lewins, 2017). I looked for chunks of data and organized them into common themes. Pattern coding analyzes how the themes and

concepts from the previous steps are relevant to the dataset (Silver & Lewins, 2017). My next step was to organize and code the data into segments for greater meaning and labeling. This included focusing on common and recurring words, beliefs, and ideas. The goal of th**is** step was to make meaning of the patterns, recurring themes, and categories, (Cypress, 2019). Common themes were grouped and reviewed to determine if possible sub-themes existed. This was an iterative process and began early on in my data collection phase.

Fourth Step: Representing and Interpreting Data

Interpretation of data in qualitative research is significant because it helps to decipher multiple layers of meanings to the human experience (Nigar, 2020). It is paramount researchers remain as neutral and objective as possible when interpreting data (Johnson et al., 2020). Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) provide sophisticated tools to improve the research process and call for researchers to select the best software to align with their style of thinking, methodological orientation, and research goals (Oswald, 2019). Dedoose software is a qualitative data analysis software and allows the researcher to organize and analyze research data regardless of what form the data takes (Salmona et al., 2019). I used the qualitative research software Dedoose for coding, data retrieval, building theories, and conducting analyses of data as it is known for its best encryption (Cypress, 2019).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research methods tend to receive criticism surrounding general misunderstandings and lack of clarity in rigor, research purpose, validity, and

transparency (Shufutinsky, 2020). The nature of qualitative studies is dependent upon researcher interpretation which may lead to personal perspectives based on cultural upbringing, experiences, values, and prior knowledge (Shufutinsky, 2020), hence the importance of a trustworthy study. There are many strategies to use for trustworthiness in qualitative research. Strategies like an audit trail, using peer debriefing, and member checking are all key components to establishing trustworthiness.

Audit Trail

Confirmability is one criterion to help ensure trustworthiness. Confirmability should secure the inter-subjectivity of data and interpretations should not be based on one's preferences and viewpoints (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Using an audit trail is one strategy for confirmability. An audit trail methodically outlines the step-by-step process and decision-making of a study (Amin et al., 2020). To maintain transparency, Lester et al. (2020) recommends developing a detailed audit trail delineating connection between data sources, codes, categories, and themes. These steps ensure the researcher's interpretation and coding process is visible to outsiders and builds trustworthiness (Lester et al., 2020). My appropriate strategies to establish confirmability was to maintain all records, field notes, and documents from this study for future review and reference by the researcher and outsiders. I also listed my daily engagement of steps taken during the study and requested assistance from a peer to review the documents.

Member Checking

Member checking is returning data, analytic categories, interpretation data, and conclusions to research participants (Amin et al., 2020). This form of trustworthiness

strengthens the dependability of research. Having participants review the details of a study provides them an opportunity to clarify inaccuracies in the data (Amin, et al., 2020), adds rigor to the research, and provides participants an opportunity to verify accuracy to interviews (Hamilton, 2020). During my follow-up with the research participants, I shared the details from their respective interviews and transcription and provided each one an opportunity to clarify or confirm accuracy. If there were any major changes, a new recording, coding, and theming occurred. As recalling stressful events can be a burden to some participants (Hamilton, 2020), before member checking I confirmed consent again to discuss details of the initial interview with participants. By seeking input from the participants on the accuracy of interviews after transcribing was a practice for this study and helped ensure dependability, credibility, and trustworthiness.

Ethical Procedures

As a law enforcement professional, I am bound by a code of ethics to be honest in thought and deed in my personal and professional life. Ethical considerations are central to research and commonly used methods in qualitative studies such as interviewing and observation which can also create intimate research relations and interpersonal trust (von Unger, 2016). Patton (2015) cautioned interviewers to have an ethical framework for dealing with ethical and vulnerable issues. Upon university approval, I shared recruitment materials such as the flyer and email with potential participants outlining privacy, volunteerism, study description, and unbiases. The informed consent form assured participants of confidentiality, informing them of their rights and the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Participation was completely voluntary.

Researching human subjects is thought to be fundamentally challenging (Bracken-Roche et al., 2017). Researchers' strong attention to the practical importance of research ethics and professional conduct when studying human participants, especially in sensitive topics, is essential to ethical research (Shaw et al., 2020). Research on IPV subjects also presents ethical concerns. Planning, conducting, and reporting IPV research should have ethics and participants' safety at the forefront of all decision-making as the interview may trigger traumatic responses (Hardesty et al., 2019). Vulnerable populations are potentially at risk of unintended adverse effects of a study (Cypress, 2019).

Ethical concerns are especially crucial to vulnerable populations and protecting this group is a key function of research (Racine & Bracken-Roche, 2018). Vulnerable populations such as gay men risk greater harm in research for reasons such as their marginalized group, and their outsider status (James & Platzer, 1999). Protecting their confidentiality and maintaining high ethical standards was a priority for this study.

Interviews with members from a vulnerable population may trigger trauma as mentioned. To address this issue, my research offered a list of free services and resources within multiple municipalities as well as contact information for national hotlines. In addition to ensuring confidentiality to participants, data management is important in research ethics. Respecting participants' rights includes maintaining confidentiality in data after it is collected (Sheperis et al., 2010). Research subjects were assured their privacy was kept private and no indicators in the study directly identified them. I removed identifying information from raw data and electronic databases, locked papers in a secure file, used a passcode for electronic databases, and deleted any unnecessary data

not needed as a part of this study (Sheperis et al., 2010). All pertinent data for this study was kept secure and only accessed by the researcher to be kept or the specified number of years allowed under university guidelines.

Finally, using reciprocity and giving back to the participant for their time and interview sends a message of thanks for their time. The practice of offering a small token of gratitude for participation in research is longstanding and widespread (Persad et al., 2019). Giving back shows the participant the researcher acknowledges their time and effort and helps restore them to their pre-participation financial baseline (Persad et al., 2019). Upon completion of the full interview as well as any follow-up interviews, I offered each participant a $20 gift card as an expression of appreciation for participation. This small token of gratitude was completely optional and did not impact my researcher bias for the participant.

Summary

Research (Baccus et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2019) shows gay men experience IPV at higher prevalence rates than their heterosexual counterparts. Consequently, they also deserve to receive services and resources tailored to their needs. Unique circumstances have stunted human services' response to addressing the needs of gay IPV survivors. Understanding the phenomenon gay men experience and the multiple-risk factors associated with being gay and a victim of IPV is a necessary component of addressing prevention and intervention for sexual minorities. The conceptual framework for this study centered around Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 theory of intersectionality. This chapter outlined the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and

methodology for a generic qualitative inquiry study. A sample made up of 10-15 participants who identified as a gay man over the age of 18 years of age and experienced IPV within the last 5 years and at least one encounter with law enforcement was used for this study. The study addressed the research question to help understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who experience intimate partner violence.

Chapter 3 also outlined the trustworthiness and ethical procedures of the research. Details on upholding professional conduct from the onset throughout the conclusion of the research were also discussed including strict guidelines and practices for informed consent, data collection, analysis, and retention. Chapter 4 presented the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, findings, and results of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative inquiry study was to understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Volunteers of this study offered insight into their experiences with formal help-seeking, when interacting with law enforcement officers who responded to their IPV calls for service. Intersectionality was used as the theoretical foundation for the study as O'Connor et al. (2019) described intersectionality as multiple demographic categories to highlight theories of oppression, power imbalances, and disadvantages for marginalized populations. An intersectionality approach offers a theoretical framework where social identity, axes identity, and class shape lived experiences of marginalized populations (Durfee, 2021). Intersectionality affords the researcher an opportunity to capture multiple dimensions while centering marginalized groups who share experienced barriers and vulnerabilities, subsequently leading to potential beneficial changes for everyone (Durfee, 2021).

The research question for this study was: What are the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced IPV during the COVID-19 global pandemic? Participants discussed their experiences with seeking formal help including from law enforcement or other official interventions and barriers encountered when experiencing violence from an abusive partner. In this chapter I focused on a detailed overview of the research I conducted and the volunteer participants. Furthermore,

descriptions of setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, results, and a summary are offered.

Setting

The research setting for this study was multi-faceted and was conducted virtually with interviews conducted via telephone and video conferencing. The sequence of my participant contacts was from email communication, a telephone conference, and video conferencing initial and follow-up interviews which were recorded and then transcribed. These practices were completed in my home office with no face-to-face interaction because of COVID 19 protocols.

Demographic Description of the Participants

The targeted sample size was 10-15 participants. The demographic features of the participants are summarized in Table 1. Sixteen volunteers showed interest in the study but there was a total of 11 participants who met the criteria for this study. Participant geographic demographics included one from the Mid-West region of the United States, three were from the Southeast region, one from the Southwest region, three were from the Northeast region, and three were from the West region. All the 11 participants were college graduates. Five of the participants were between the ages of 18-26; five were between the ages of 27-37; and one participant was between 38-47 years of age. Ten self-identified as African American and one self-identified as Asian American. One participant was in an IPV relationship for less than a year. Eight participants were in an abusive relationship for one to five years. There were two participants who indicated being in an IPV relationship for six to ten years. Ten participants held full-time jobs

while one worked part-time. Four participants were currently married. Two were separated. Five were unmarried.

Table 1

Demographics

Demographics	Number
Age	
18-26	5
27-37	5
38-47	1
Race	
Asian-American	10
African American	1
Geographic Location	
Northeast	3
Southeast	3
West	3
Mid-West	1
Southwest	1
Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic	11
Educational Level	
College Graduate	11
Length in Relationship	
0-1 years	1
1-5 years	8
5-10 years	2
Employment Status	
Full time	10
Part-time	1
Marital Status	
Married	4
Separated	2
Unmarried	5
Total Number of Participants	11

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected from the 11 participants who volunteered to be interviewed after meeting the recruitment criteria. Recruitment flyers were shared on the social media platforms of Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter, with local, state, and national organizations, professors at colleges and universities, frequented venues of the targeted population, professional networks, co-workers, newsletters, faith-based organizations, and via email correspondence. Volunteers responded by email or text message with interest in the study and requested additional information.

From the email and/or text message a phone conference call was set to determine eligibility for the study. During the phone call, a screening criteria questionnaire was completed. If volunteers met the criteria by answering yes to all listed questions, they were advised they would receive via email a recruitment package outlining the study and eligibility requirements, a copy of the informed consent, screening criteria and demographics, contact information for the national domestic violence hotline, as well as a hyperlink for these documents and set up for an initial interview. The hyperlink would also include a direct link to the screening criteria and demographics questionnaire to capture this data through Survey Monkey, an online data/survey collection tool. The initial and follow-up interviews were conducted through Zoom video conference.

The initial interview was recorded, and the participant was read the recruitment criteria and informed consent and given an opportunity to ask questions before starting the interview. Due to the consequences of a video interview, participants were required to give verbal and recorded consent to participate in the study. Initial interviews lasted

approximately 60 minutes. Upon the conclusion of the interview, a follow-up interview was scheduled within 7 days. The purpose of this interview was to review initial responses for accuracy and provide participants an opportunity to offer feedback on the study.

Organization

A filing system was set up for participants who met the screening criteria which included a copy of the recruitment package of the informed consent, survey criteria, demographics questionnaire and a unique participant ID number. This packet had the researcher's handwritten field notes, unique participant ID number, Zoom ID information for both interviews; chosen form of honorarium payment, and the dates and times contact was made with the participant. All documents were stored in a locked file cabinet only accessed by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Once I concluded the initial interview, I did an initial transcription using the Microsoft Word dictate feature to transcribe the recorded interviews into a word document. After this first transcription, I read through the completed word documents for responses and accuracy to each interview question. The transcription from the audio to text file was accurate despite the ad libs of an occasional "um" or dictation of unrelated responses to the interview questions. During the follow-up interview I used the initial transcription to update any changes received from the participants' feedback for accuracy. The secondary interview was also transcribed using the Microsoft Word dictate feature as described above. I repeated the process for all subsequent interviews.

Review and Explore Data

Next, I typed out each interview question and reviewed the first participant's interview responses for answers to every question. The follow-up interview was scheduled within 7 days of the initial interview. During the follow-up interview, I reviewed the initial responses and asked the participant to provide feedback and confirm accuracy of the first interview. Upon completion of both interviews, I did a second transcription using an upload of the audio file to the Word dictate feature. Last, I combined the responses from both interviews into a final document with the respective interview questions to prepare to begin the coding process. Prior to uploading the completed interviews into the qualitative data analysis software, I read over them multiple times for recurring words, themes, patterns, and interesting responses. I used a highlighting system to group commonalities, themes, and patterns for each interview response. Next, I uploaded the completed interview transcriptions to the qualitative data analysis software tool, Dedoose. I also uploaded the survey questions and demographic questionnaire which were word documents separate from the transcribed interview data files.

One variation from my original planned data collection process was the lack of volunteers recruited within my local area. Consequently, I requested and was approved by IRB, to expand the geographic location for my target population. As a result of COVID-19 precautions and the usage of video conferencing, this change was practical and yielded an overwhelming response of potential participants.

Initial Coding

My initial coding consisted of reading a hard copy of each of the 11 participants combined first and second interview transcriptions, looking for codes, and similar phrases and/or statements in the respective interviews. I read each transcript and sections of the data in each transcript were color coded a specific color to reflect my initial thoughts on the key words in the content. This initial analysis is described as descriptive coding where a segment of data/text is first considered in an analysis (Silver & Lewins, 2017). I highlighted key words which were repeated and made margin notes about each participant's response. Once I believed I had exhausted the codes in all the transcriptions separately, I analyzed the 11 transcriptions collectively for coding and themes. I submitted all the transcripts as a body of collective data to Dedoose. Using Dedoose allowed me to group and see codes cross transcripts using colors and subcodes also called parent/child coding (Silver& Lewins, 2017).

Once that process was complete, I re-read the transcripts to analyze the content of the data for deeper themes and concepts. Silver and Lewins (2017) referred to this process as interpretive coding. The last step of my coding process consisted of re-reading transcripts where I focused in detail on recurring words, beliefs, and ideas. I looked for patterns that then formed categories of codes. From these categories, I looked for the interpreted theme I found in the data. I also identified sub-themes related to those themes and grouped into more sub-themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness within a qualitative research design seeks to answer the question of, “Can the findings be trusted” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018)? As a novice researcher, it was important to me that my study had a foundation in trustworthiness. This study was conducted in such a manner to make sure integrity was upheld during each step of the research. I started writing journal entries which reflected on my thoughts as well as the progress of data collection and steps taken during interviews. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) trustworthiness relies on four general criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This study used an audit trail, reflexivity in journaling, peer debriefing, and member checking as a means of trustworthiness.

Credibility

When there is a lack of transparency, the credibility of qualitative research is threatened (Adler, 2022). To maintain transparency, I used a form of triangulation known as member-checking. My follow-up interview was conducted and recorded via Zoom. I reviewed the informed consent with each participant prior to the follow-up interview. Once it was established that the participant still volunteered to be a part of the study, I re-read each interview question and the initial response given by the participant. I asked the volunteer to confirm the response from the initial interview for accuracy and feedback. If there were any inaccuracies, I immediately made the corrections on the hard copy of the transcript along with the recorded interview. After the follow-up interview was completed, I compared the responses from both interviews and did a second transcription. Member-checking allows the participant to ensure accuracy of the analysis and results

from their perspective (Adler, 2022). In addition to member-checking, I used peer-debriefing to maintain trustworthiness. Peer-debriefing is the habit of institutional checking on one's research with supervisory personnel (Adler, 2022). I completed periodical check-ins with my dissertation chair by submitting weekly updates on my study.

Transferability

Transferability assists the researcher in providing a thick description of the participants and research process to assess whether the findings are transferable to readers in other settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I ensured the information obtained from the participants included detailed descriptions of their experiences, offered specific steps on how I sought out my sample population, my interview settings, questions, and demographics. The demographic questionnaire was completed by each participant and showed participants from various regions of the United States of America. Interview questions were asked within the same sequence for each interview. Volunteers were able to share their thick descriptions of respective experiences with IPV. This current study can be a resource for human service professionals, advocates, law enforcement officers, and nonprofit organizations to help increase awareness of the experiences and needs of gay men who have experienced IPV.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research focuses on proper research of a study, consistency of the findings, and if they can be repeated (Johnson, et al., 2020). My strategy for dependability was to establish an audit trail. Audit trails assist with

transparency of the research process. An audit trail is a record of how a qualitative study was carried out, its conclusions were reached, provides specific information about the data, and how the data analysis was recorded (Carcary, 2020).

I used the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose for this study. I input my interview transcripts, demographics, screening criteria and interview questions into Dedoose for analysis. Using Dedoose allowed me to use codes, sub-codes, themes, sub themes, and descriptors from various forms of documents (i.e., Microsoft Word, Excel, audio, video).

It is important to have a systematic and detailed record of decisions made before and during research so others can come to conclusions about the research (Earnest, 2020). This audit trail helped me show and explain the reasons behind my methodology, coding, and themes from the participants' interviews. Establishing an audit trail, I help potential readers understand my process with coding and theme patterns.

Confirmability

Confirmability is grounded in neutrality and research interpretations should not be based on the researcher's own preferences or viewpoints but grounded in the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In addition to using an audit trail, I used reflexivity to establish trustworthiness in confirmability. Reflexivity is when the researcher takes an inward look at their biases and background during the beginning stages of a study and continued throughout the research process (Dodgson, 2019). Within the informed consent, I disclosed in writing and verbally, my professional work, the length of time employed in the field and background experience. I maintained a daily journal of steps

taken when making phone calls, setting up initial and follow-up interviews, sending honorariums, when participants failed to keep scheduled interviews, and all other tasks associated with my study. I strategized and maintained all records, field notes, transcripts, questionnaires, recordings, screening criteria and other documents pertaining to the study. These tasks included email and correspondence sent when seeking participant recruitment.

Results

Nine interview questions were asked (See Appendix C) for this study. After both interviews for each participant were transcribed, coded, sub-coded, themed, and patterned, I discovered three themes which answered my research question. I labeled these themes as: discrimination, lack of training and resources, and negative attitudes towards law enforcement. Repeated words such as discrimination, racism, lack of response in service and resources, professionalism, and attention contributed to these themes. Each theme is represented and described below.

Discrimination Toward Gay Men

A theme of discrimination was garnered from the viewpoints of the gay men in the ambivalence of their treatment by law enforcement officers when responding to their IPV incident. Discrimination emerged as 7 of the 11 participants discussed feelings of being treated unfairly when law enforcement officers responded to their intimate partner violence incident. Participants used terms such as unjust, prejudice, unfair, and biased when asked about their experience with law enforcement officers. One participant stated: “Because of my sexuality I think I received discrimination, bias, and judgement in how

my situation was handled by law enforcement." Another participant mentioned the officers did not "treat me well, were unfair, and not take me seriously when they first responded." A third participant stated: "It is just the police I do not care for because of my interaction with them. Law enforcement treated me different and with prejudice because I am Black." A fourth participant mentioned "I called law enforcement once and when they pulled up, I could sense discrimination." One last volunteer responded by saying, "I think they need to stop discrimination and treat people equal regardless of sexuality."

The 7 participants expressed feeling a lack of a sense of importance, understanding, attention, and response by officers which caused a level of mistrust. This aligns with Decker's et al. (2018) mention that sexual minorities of IPV are hesitant to contact the police because of tensions between them and officers. Volunteers from this study believed responding officers mistreated them based on sexuality and lack of seriousness to the crime. Despite obvious injuries and signs of struggle, officers did not address the issue of intimate partner violence and appeared unconcerned to the participants. According to Mallory et al. (2015), discrimination and harassment by law enforcement based on sexual orientation or gender identity exists throughout the entire United States. Participants from this study were from various cities throughout the continental United States, yet most seemed to reflect on how they felt discriminated against by law enforcement officers. Discrimination against gay men by law enforcement officers seems common across multiple jurisdictions.

Lack of Resources For Gay Men and Training For Law Enforcement

Lack of resources (phone numbers, websites, shelters, support groups, and counselors who are experienced with working with gay men IPV victims) and training for law enforcement were concluded based on the responses by participants who stated they only received information from friends, family, social media, and associates regarding IPV. Ten out of 11 participants expressed concern with human service professionals, including law enforcement, not having knowledge to provide resources for them and lacked training when responding to intimate partner violence. No participant received information from law enforcement during their interaction. Participants reported that information gathered from social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Google searches, and Reddit provided them with knowledge about how to handle being in an IPV relationship. A participant stated: "Information I found on Facebook helped me learn about intimate partner violence like who to speak with and various resources for gay men." Additionally, the LGBTQ community, family, clergy, therapists, and counselors provided a strong sense of community for the participants by sharing resources such as support groups and shelters. Informal support from other members within the LGBTQ community was also a huge help for gay men seeking resources for being in an abusive relationship. "The LGBTQ community where I stay is quite strong and there is public assistance to get resources" was how one participant described an experience. According to volunteers for this study, few law enforcement officers provided them with services or resources on where to seek help from an abusive relationship.

It was stressed by participants that law enforcement should have additional training on the resources in their respective areas, consider the feelings of victims of IPV, improve awareness of the dynamics of being gay and in an abusive relationship, and have more gender-based training. Awareness and proper training of how officers should respond to gay men in an IPV relationship were key points of the participants. During an interview, one participant mentioned: "The officers should know local resources and services that can help gay men. They should have additional training to work on their attitude towards gender issues and the gay community." A second participant stated, "Professionals should create more awareness. There is no proper training for LGBTQ and domestic violence." It was suggested by one participant that law enforcement officers should "try to put themselves in our shoes and more training should be in place by them." Educating law enforcement officers with information to help shift their attitudes and sharpen their training skills, handle cases of IPV with gay men, and where to direct them for resources was an important theme from this research.

Negative Attitude Towards Law Enforcement

The third theme that emerged was a negative attitude towards law enforcement officers. Five of the 11 participants held negative viewpoints towards law enforcement while three others shared mixed feelings and attitudes about law enforcement. Volunteers for this study expressed a negative attitude towards law enforcement specifically, but stated there were no major issues when interacting with other human service providers such as counselors or therapists. "I have mixed feelings about law enforcement. The officers who responded when I contacted them the first time were not helpful" one

participant stated. “I do not like officers. I did not have a good experience with law enforcement. They should not use gender and race as a factor when dealing with people” was stated by another participant. A third volunteer stated: “I would not want to do it again. Call them. I felt when they came, they did not pay attention to the situation.” These actions by law enforcement officers towards gay men seeking help from IPV were contributing factors of to the negative attitude with officers.

Furthermore, participants reported poor communication, lack of seriousness, and the poor quality of an investigation contributed to the negative attitude the gay men had towards law enforcement. Volunteers expressed feeling a sense of discord between them and law enforcement officers because of being judged based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Having a professional demeanor rather than displaying personal and judgmental beliefs when interacting with gay men in abusive relationships was another factor that affected the negative attitude towards police officers. One participant is quoted as saying: “Law enforcement is separate, and I have a totally different experience with them. I have had bad experiences with law enforcement. My advice is to remain professional and place the professional duties before their personal beliefs.” Overall, participants for this study believed their abusive relationships were not taken seriously by law enforcement officers when compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Consequently, these beliefs played a part in the negative attitudes of the participants.

Summary

Three themes were found in this study with all or most participants agreeing law enforcement officers displayed discrimination when responding to their violent incident,

their information about IPV did not come from law enforcement, and there were negative attitudes towards law enforcement because of their response. From the results, it is clear law enforcement officers need additional training in how to address the needs of gay men. More than half of the participants interviewed felt discriminated against and the officers needed more resources and training. Despite some participants having a positive experience with law enforcement, many believed the overall demeanor of law enforcement was not pleasant. Addressing the themes from this research can help strengthen the relationship between gay men and human service providers, including law enforcement.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative inquiry addressed my research question of understanding the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who have experienced intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 global pandemic. There were 11 participants from multiple communities within the continental United States who agreed to be interviewed and shared their experiences with intimate partner violence. Data was uploaded into the Dedoose qualitative data analysis software and used to analyze, code and theme to help understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men in an IPV relationship. From the data, key findings included most participants felt law enforcement officers exercised discrimination when responding to their intimate partner violence situation, officers exhibited a lack of training and did not provide specific resources for the participants, and volunteers displayed a negative attitude towards officers over other human service professionals.

Interpretation of the Findings

Using an intersectional approach can help professionals understand and respond in the appropriate manner. This research study used an intersectionality approach to help understand formal help-seeking experiences of gay men in an IPV relationship. An intersectionality approach was important to the findings of this study because it helped to explore identities of gay men and various stigmas associated with being a gay man and a victim of intimate partner violence. Identities such as being gay, and a victim of intimate partner abuse intersect and suggests that marginalized groups experience trauma within

complex systems of power (Gkiouleka et al., 2018). Additionally, intersectional identities impact how law enforcement treat marginalized groups like gay men (Satuluri & Nadel, 2018). Several participants in this study stressed that law enforcement response was not professional and rooted in discrimination when officers responded to their intimate partner violence incident.

The findings from this study appear to align with previous research (Coston, 2019; Russell & Sturgeon, 2018; Satulri & Nadel, 2018) on gay men, IPV, and interaction with law enforcement. IPV among marginalized groups has complexities which some human service providers do not fully grasp or understand. Intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, and being a victim of IPV contribute to the challenges of stigma and discrimination gay men face when seeking help to be isolated from an abusive partner. In addition to supporting the previous research, responses to the interview questions helped me understand possible reasons behind the reluctance for gay men to contact law enforcement during an intimate partner violence encounter. These reasons helped conclude the themes of discrimination, lack of resources for gay men and training for law enforcement, and a negative attitude towards law enforcement that arose from the analysis of data for this study.

Discrimination Towards Gay Men

Addington (2020) reported the mistrust between sexual minorities and law enforcement is rooted in fear, and encounters with police officers can yield perceptions of discrimination and insensitive responses. With the theme of discrimination, the findings from this study aligned with those of Satuluri and Nadel (2018), in that discrimination by

law enforcement can include passive misconduct such as profiling individuals as criminals based on sexual orientation. One participant described the police encounter as: "Officers did not address my partner's behavior but looked at me to fix the problem and did nothing until I had visible injuries." Another participant described their experience as being "downplayed" by officers as well. Serious in nature, it is important that victims of IPV (including gay men) have police access when needed and without judgment. The premise of criminality based on sexual orientation yields stigma and discrimination. Therefore, it is advantageous for gay men who are victims of intimate partner violence to feel they are treated less like a criminal or outcast and more humanized when calling the police for help.

Multiple participants in this study expressed feeling a sense of discrimination when law enforcement was called for assistance with an abusive relationship based on the demeanor, attitude, lack of assistance, and ambivalent response from the officer. Another participant described the experience as unfair treatment and stated: "When I brought the matter to the police, I felt discriminated against because my partner is white and I am black." This statement suggested that discriminatory practices by law enforcement towards sexual minorities had bias and racial implications. The interaction between gay men and the police when responding to an IPV incident should be one of trust, dignity, respect, and not lack the inclusion of marginalized groups.

Police officers are usually the first within the human services profession to encounter intimate partner violence victims (Russell, 2018). This interaction is a gateway to other avenues (i.e. court proceedings, shelters, advocates) for victims and should be

addressed without personal feelings but professional actions. One participant stated law enforcement officers should “remain professional and place professional duties before their personal beliefs.” Personal beliefs about law enforcement can prevent individualized members of marginalized groups from trusting in a system and seeking help. Participants from this study wanted officers to respond with a sense of urgency. According to Russell (2018), law enforcement officers minimize the potential seriousness of an IPV incident between same-sex couples which impacts the interaction between officers and those they are called to serve.

Participants offered their opinions that officers’ actions implied the victims were to address and work out the issues amongst themselves. “He did not act like it was that important. He told me to calm my partner down and if I wanted to go forward with making a report, I can contact them back” was how a participant described feeling discriminated against by responding officers. “I felt when they came, they actually did not pay attention to the situation” was how another participant explained the officers’ behavior. These actions speak to the previous practices of IPV being a private family matter some 40 years ago where law enforcement did not involve themselves in these types of disputes. Despite the years of advancement in laws and practices, some officers who responded to the participants in this study seem to revert to protocols prior to IPV becoming a crime. Thereby, this suggests the need for additional resources and training and leads to my second theme.

Lack of Resources For Gay Men And Training For Law Enforcement

For the theme of the lack of resources and training for law enforcement, all the participants mentioned receiving information about available resources, the dynamics of IPV, and how to handle abusive relationships from sources other than law enforcement officers. “I grew up with parents who were in an intimate partner violence marriage daddy and mommy they use to fight. It was something I was used to seeing. I got my resources there” is how one participant described learning about intimate partner violence. Another participant mentioned: “I normally see information about intimate partner violence on social media and television and it’s about male and female not about people of the same gender.” These quotes support the stance of Goldsberg-Looney et al. (2016) that gay men receive less resources and few know little about this marginalized group.

This could potentially suggest the officers were not aware of resources for gay men in an abusive relationship, or that more training for law enforcement responders is warranted to appropriately address the needs of this population. Consequently, this limited understanding affects officers’ response, and indicates the need for specific training on the complexity of intimate partner violence to help officers gain more realistic understandings of challenges with leaving an abusive relationship (Gill et al., 2021).

One of those challenges includes the fact of intimate partner violence being one of the most reported crimes to the police yet it is not addressed by professionals like other crimes. Intimate partner violence is complex and diverse which requires officers to consider all the dynamics associated with responding to these incidents despite their lack

of comprehension of the dynamics (Gill et al., 2021). According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2017), domestic disturbance calls (which includes intimate partner violence) are the most dangerous and difficult calls for law enforcement because officers are ambushed while approaching the scene or asked to interpret legal decisions and verify court orders. Escalation of violence during an intimate partner violence call is a warning sign for possible lethal violence and officers need to assess the risks and take the appropriate action (Nesset et al., 2020). Awareness of the dynamics of IPV coupled with knowledge of how to guide and respond to these incidents keeps officers, victims, and offenders safe. “Officers should know local resources and services that can help gay men. They should be familiar with social media platforms for the LGBTQ community” one participant stated. Knowing local and community resources along with educating officers can contribute to an overall positive attitude gay men have towards law enforcement.

Negative Attitude Towards Law Enforcement

Because of participants’ own experiences with how officers interacted with them when responding to the incident of violence, the third theme of a negative attitude towards the law enforcement officers was somewhat congruent with previous studies by Calton et al. (2016), Freeland et al. (2018), and Durfee and Goodmark (2020). It also goes beyond previous research, as the data in this study documented the participants’ experiences that led to their perspective. Overall participants shared they understood the dynamics of IPV and sought help from law enforcement. However, when the officers responded, the interaction between them and the participants could be described as unpleasant. “They tend to judge and not open to accepting us. The communication is

poor, and it's not recognized. In my case it was not taken seriously" was how a participant described feelings towards law enforcement. A second participated is quoted as saying about law enforcement: "They handle cases with a lack of seriousness and view cases without quality." Participants felt the officers did not take the violence nor any visible injuries serious in nature and consequently responded in an unprofessional manner. Such actions by law enforcement left participants with a sense of distrust in the system and the officers. They described distrust as doubting law enforcement would provide unbiased and non-judgmental service while handling an IPV incident. Understanding a gay man's experiences when addressing an intimate partner violence incident can impact social injustice and inequality in a positive way.

Limitations

Limitations found in this study include COVID-19 restrictions, challenges with recruitment strategies, data collection, and internet access. Originally, my study was to include a 1-year criteria for being in an intimate partner relationship within the metropolitan area of my state. After my initial recruiting process, there were no volunteers. I discussed this matter with my chair, committee, and IRB. From that discussion, it was approved to widen my scope to include the previous 5 years and the continental United States. Once these changes were made, there was an increase in volunteers. Of the 11 participants, three were from Northeastern states, three were from Western states, three were from Southeastern states; one was from a Southwestern state; and one was from a Midwestern state. Noticeably, these recruitment challenges limited my data collection as no volunteers were from my original targeted Midwest state/area

nor Northern part of the continental United States; possibly contributing to a smaller sample size. While this does not indicate these findings may not be applicable to these areas, it should be considered a limitation as unique circumstances may impact populations in this area. Furthermore, I found data collection challenges to include some volunteers willing to participate but not meeting the eligibility criteria and using technology to create survey links and questionnaires to use via the Internet. Having Internet access was a requirement for this study which caused limitations for those without this access or not interested in video conferencing interviews. During some interviews, there were technical difficulties which was another limitation of using the Internet and video conferencing. These limitations did not limit the study's value in findings but in the generalizability.

My study used semi-structured interviews to capture data from participants. During the interview, volunteers responded to some questions which potentially needed additional follow-up beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, data saturation was reached around the 6th and 7th participant and helped develop the patterns and themes for the study.

Recommendations

Human Services Practice

Recommendations for the three themes (discrimination, lack of resources and training, and negative attitudes towards law enforcement) outlined in this research include: an implementation of a community roundtable discussion between law enforcement and gay men; sensitivity training with members of the gay community; and

incorporate statewide regular training as a part of law enforcement state certification for employment. According to Israel et al. (2017), diversity training for law enforcement in how to interact with sexual minority groups and working together will address barriers such as reporting crimes, bias, and hostile treatment. Furthermore, having laws and widespread policies on IPV for professionals helps law enforcement reactions to IPV and improves victim safety (Russell & Sturgeon, 2018).

Given the dynamics of gay men in an IPV relationship, it is important for human service providers to be cognizant of the uniqueness of these matters and respond in an appropriate manner. Based on the thematic findings of this study, it is recommended for human service professionals, including law enforcement, to consider the intersections like gender identity, sexual orientation, and victimization of IPV experienced by marginalized groups such as gay men when responding to domestic violence.

Volunteers in this study emphasized the need to be heard and taken seriously by law enforcement officers when responding to an IPV incident. Having representation of marginalized groups present during key decision making for how to address intimate partner violence on micro and macro levels is important for all stakeholders. One of the volunteers stated: “It would be better if they engage members of the LGBTQ community and offer the appropriate resources.”

A coordinated community response works together to provide victims of IPV resources from each entity within our criminal justice system and human services. Law enforcement officers, prosecutors, courts, advocates, social workers, shelters, counselors, and therapists work together with victims of IPV to ensure needs are met for them as well

as their families. Consequently, it behooves law enforcement officers, often the initial contact for victims, to have knowledge of how to direct victims in an abusive relationship. When asked the interview question of how IPV can be addressed by professionals, one participant stated, “provide specific contact information outside of calling 911…other places who offer resources for gender-based violence and educate the community on what to do…”. Macro-social dynamics such as services and resources offered to gay men who experience intimate partner violence also affects social determinants like social protection, social inclusion, and non-discrimination. If these areas are addressed, social change in addressing intimate partner violence for all victims, especially gay men, can become optimistic.

Future Research

More research is needed into how law enforcement officers responding to gay male IPV perceive their role and responsibilities with this population and how they conceptualize appropriate response. Marginalized groups like gay men are entitled to the same level of services and resources as their heterosexual counterparts when in an abusive relationship. Research conducted by Freeland et al. (2018) suggested the unique circumstances of gay men in an IPV relationship shape their experiences and the need for tailored interventions. Additional training on the unique dynamics of the needs of members of the LGBTQ community, specifically gay men, need to be implemented in regular training curriculums for human service providers. Training should be trauma informed, intersectional and culturally specific. Many factors intersect to affect how gay men are viewed and the stigma alone of being a victim of IPV adds to this misperception.

Taking an intersectional approach to address IPV among gay men is one step towards understanding their experiences. Based on one volunteer's statement, "engage the members of the LGBTQ community. Yes, the future would be better if professionals would engage the community, be sensitive and open to same gender experiences" best describes the importance of human service professionals, specifically law enforcement officers.

Implications For Human Services and the Social Determinants of Health

I have worked as a public servant for the last 26 ½ years where the last 13 years have been in the field of IPV. From this experience, I have gained understanding in the general area of the dynamic of intimate abuse, however I still lacked in areas of serving marginalized groups such as gay men. Issues surrounding gay men and understanding their formal help-seeking experiences when there is IPV had not been addressed.

The findings of this study are made more relevant when explored through the lens of the theoretical framework of intersectionality. Gay men are met with many challenges of discrimination and stigma while also experiencing intimate partner abuse. This suggests to those being served that human service providers, including law enforcement officers, need to be better equipped to serve. Implications for social change should include changes for all human service professionals. Policies, procedures, and training should be inclusive of all populations and cultures. Advancements in training for human service providers is necessary to provide gay men in an abusive relationship access to services and resources. These improvements may have a potential positive impact on

social change for social service agencies, society, and the social determinants of health, and more importantly, gay men in abusive relationships.

Conclusion

IPV is a crime that stretches across all walks of life. Federal funding initially supported services and resources for women, predominately in heterosexual relationships. Through law reauthorizations, changes were made to include marginalized groups like gay men. Despite a higher prevalence of abuse among gay men when compared to opposite sex couples, members from this population go unserved or underserved as victims of IPV. There are varying factors for this lack of services.

Intersections of being gay and a victim of IPV presented various dynamics and complexities when attempting to understand the experiences of gay men in an abusive relationship. This study sought to understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men in an abusive relationship by using a semi-structured interview.

The findings demonstrated gay men experience discrimination and stigma from law enforcement officers when responding to an IPV incident. Human service professionals, specifically law enforcement officers, do not have a clear understanding on the dynamics of IPV in gay male relationships and continue to lack knowledge in how to address the needs of this marginalized group. Implications of the problem presented in this study indicates a larger concern when addressing the needs of gay men and formal help-seeking from an IPV relationship.

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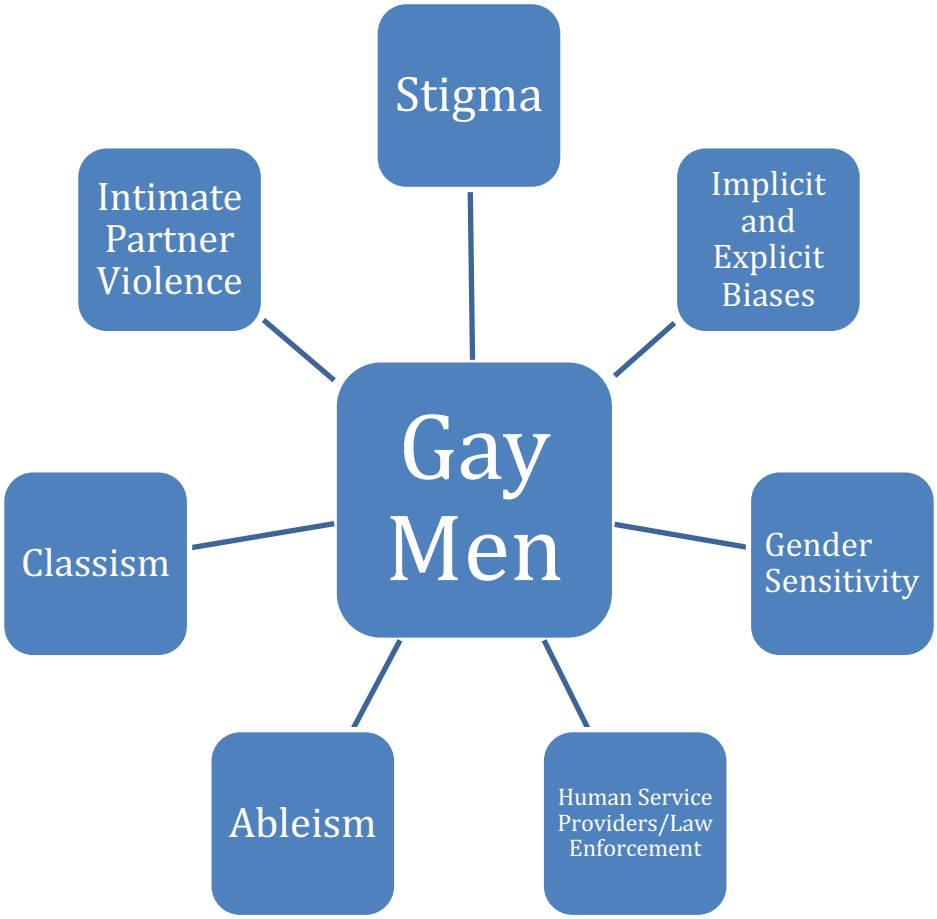
Appendix A: Figure 1

Figure 2

Gay Men and Intersectionality



Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Please Circle One Option

Age:

18-26 27-37 38-47 48-57 58+

Ethnicity:

Hispanic Non-Hispanic

Race:

African-American Asian-American White Native-American Other

What income group does your household fall under?

Less than $20,000 $21,000-$30,000 $41,000-$50,000 $51,000-$60,000 Above $60,000

What is your educational level?

High School Some College College Graduate Other (please specify)

Length in your intimate partner violence relationship:

0-1 years 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-20 years 21+ years

What is your marital status?

Married Divorced Separated Widowed Unmarried

What is your current employment status?

Full-time Part-time Unemployed Self-Employed Student Retired

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Participants

Read to the Participate "Thank you for participating in this research study on how to understand the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men in intimate partner violence relationships. I chose this topic for my dissertation study because I am passionate about exploring issues surrounding intimate partner violence specifically those impacting the gay community. I am conducting this research as part of my dissertation at Walden University where I am a Doctoral candidate. I am interested in this study because I would like to understand the professional help-seeking experience of gay men involved in an intimate partner violence relationship.

Before we start, can you tell me a little about yourself such as how long have you been in your relationship, if you are currently in a relationship, what you do for a living, or anything else you would like to tell me about yourself? Thank the person and tell the person about the order of the questions. My interview questions will consist of the following: 1. A discussion about intimate partner violence relationships. 2. How do you feel about your experiences involving intimate partner violence? 3. As a gay man how do you experience seeking help when in an intimate partner violence relationship? 4. What happened during your encounter with law enforcement concerning an intimate partner violence incident? 5. Your experience of identifying as a gay man and interaction with law enforcement. 6. A discussion on services and resources received by human service professionals? Feel free to elaborate on any question and remember confidentiality is assured. Do you have any questions about the informed consent you signed? If at any time, you have any questions before, during, or after the interview contact me. Before we

get started into the issues just mentioned, tell me a little about yourself. (Thank the person for telling about themselves then inform them we are starting with the questions. Remind the participants that there are no right or wrong answers and their answers are only shared with the dissertation chair and committee and completely confidential.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and your views on intimate partner violence.

2. How long were you (or have you been) in an intimate partner violence relationship and how much violence occurred in the relationship?

3. What has been your experience in an intimate partner violence relationship pre and post COVID-19?

4. Tell me what you have noticed about law enforcement's response to your intimate partner violence relationship.

5. Where have you ever received information about intimate partner violence from? What information did you receive?

6. How can the future of addressing intimate partner violence by professionals be improved?

7. What matters most to you about law enforcement's response to intimate partner violence?

8. What barriers from professionals do you receive when seeking formal help in an intimate partner violence relationship?

9. Can you talk about your views towards human service providers including law enforcement?

This concludes the interview. Do you have any questions for me? From this point, I am going to continue to interview more participants. If you have anyone who you think may qualify for the study give them my phone number. Once I have enough participants, I am going to analyze what all the participants have said. To ensure I accurately noted what you said, I would like to have a short follow up within the next 7 days if you agree. Once this dissertation is completed, I will send you an emailed copy of the dissertation or if you would like a physical copy please let me know via phone or email.

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

Lead Researcher: Kyla Williams

Kyla Williams is a doctoral candidate at Walden University and recruiting participants for a research study about understanding the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men in intimate partner violence relationships. This study may help us to better understand the experiences of gay men who have encountered law enforcement as a result of being in an intimate partner violence relationship.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age or older, identify as a gay man, have been in an intimate partner violence relationship within the last 5 years, reside in the continental United States, had at least one encounter with law enforcement, and access to the Internet.

Due to COVID-19 precautions, the study will take place via Zoom video conferencing. Your participation will last between 60-90 minutes each day for a total of 2 days during the data collection process.

As part of participating, you will be asked to discuss your experiences with intimate partner violence relationships and formal help-seeking experiences with law enforcement.

You will be paid for your participation in this research as follows: a $20 gift card upon completion of the initial and follow-up interviews.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me.

Appendix E: Screening Criteria

Do you identify as a gay man, over the age of 18 **and** not currently in an intimate partner violence relationship?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, continue with screening. If no, person doesn't fit criteria, terminate screening and thank person

Have you ever been an intimate partner violence relationship?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, continue with screening. If no, person doesn't fit criteria, terminate screening and thank person

Did you contact law enforcement at least one time because of an intimate partner violence situation? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, continue with screening. If no, person doesn't fit criteria, terminate screening and thank person

Do you reside in the Metropolitan (named city) area?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, continue with screening. If no, person doesn't fit criteria, terminate screening and thank person

If yes, the person meets the screening criteria, include the person in the study. If no, person doesn't fit criteria, terminate screening and thank person

Appendix F: Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating as a research participant in this study concerning your experiences with intimate partner violence. The present study focused on understanding the formal help-seeking experiences of gay men who encounter law enforcement during an intimate partner violence relationship. If you know of any friends, family or colleagues that are eligible to participate in this study, we ask that you share the recruitment flyer with them but do not discuss the details of the study until after they have had an opportunity to participate. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, feel free to ask the researcher by contacting via email or phone.

In the event you feel any trauma and/or unhealthy triggers, you are encouraged to contact the researcher for referrals to local agencies which provide services and resources tailored to intimate partner violence needs.