

Gender Patterns in Intimate Partner Violence: Results from 33 Campus Climate Surveys Based on the Partner Victimization Scale

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Overview

Objective: The replication of findings is an important aspect of scientific research. This report examines data from a literature review of campus climate surveys and other research publications to determine the replicability of the pattern of gender asymmetry in intimate partner violence (IPV) found in the first studies using the Partner Victimization Scale (PVS). The key feature of the PVS is that it addresses the issue of false positives by instructing participants to omit behaviors that involved horseplay or joking around. **Method:** A search of the literature identified 33 studies, all campus climate surveys, with data on gender patterns in victimization rates based on the PVS. Together, the studies include more than 29,000 participants. Many sites adapted or modified the PVS, but all retained the key instruction to omit incidents due to horseplay or joking around. **Results:** The pooled averages of all survey sites showed a rate of female victimization (18.0%) that is almost double the rate of male victimization (10.6%), a statistically significant difference. Although only available for three campuses, rates for participants who identified as transgender or gender non-conforming were high (19.4%). **Conclusions:** The results provide independent replication of the gender asymmetry found in Hamby's original study. These findings are consistent with other IPV indicators, including homicide data, reports to police, witness reports, arrests, help-seeking data, and some other self-report data. These results provide further support for the premise that the gender symmetry that has been found in other surveys may be largely due to false positive reports. Further research should include the full spectrum of gender identities to better understand gender and IPV.

Introduction

As a society, we have reached consensus on many aspects of intimate partner violence (IPV), such as recognizing the severity of harms often caused by IPV and the need to invest in efforts to understand the causes and ameliorate IPV's negative impacts (Black et al., 2011). Understanding the prevalence, victimization, and perpetration of IPV is crucial to furthering efforts to curtail it. However, tracking the occurrence of IPV has proved unexpectedly challenging, with large discrepancies in the rates of IPV across data sources (Hamby, 2014). Even more surprisingly, some measures have suggested gender parity, or similar rates of victimization for men and women (with very little data on people who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming). In contrast, many other indicators, such as homicide rates, reports to the police, arrests by police, reports by witnesses, help-seeking, and some other self-report measures, do not find gender parity. Recently, Hamby (2016a,b) has identified false positives as a likely source of the gender parity observed with some measures, based on previous research on false positives and a series of studies exploring the impact of item wording on obtained gender patterns for IPV (Hamby, 2016a,b). This report summarizes the findings of others who have used or adapted the Partner Victimization Scale (PVS) to explore gender patterns in independent replications.

Hamby (2017a) provides an overview of the debate that continues among violence researchers on the problem of accurately measuring IPV, namely, the question of gender parity in reports of IPV victimization. Gender parity researchers have defined parity as “approximately equal rates of perpetration of nonsexual physical assaults by male and female partners, or higher rates by female partners” (Straus, 2011, p. 280). Some research methodologies, typically self-report scales, produce seemingly incongruous results as compared to the reports coming out of legal, criminal, and advocacy institutions (Hamby, 2009, 2014). Although the latter data sources support the notion that women experience IPV victimization at rates higher than do men, this asymmetry is often not reflected in results from self-report scales, especially the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Overwhelmingly, women are the primary seekers of aid from law enforcement, shelters, and other services in the context of IPV (Hamby, 2009; 2014). If support seeking followed the data found in much of IPV research, we should see equal or similar levels of support-seeking between men and women. As many studies report a lack of gender difference in victimization or perpetration (e.g., Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992; Straus, 2007), one would expect to see that reflected in criminal incident reports, advocate client logs, and numbers of shelter residents. This discrepancy produces an important quandary for violence researchers that warrants more widespread investigation.

Given that findings of gender parity are contrary to reports by legal, criminal, and advocacy institutions, we must consider the validity of the scales used in IPV research

(Hamby, 2014). Hamby has hypothesized that it is the wording of survey questions that creates the illusion of parity, and that false positives in some surveys explain the discrepancy across some broadly-worded surveys and other sources of data on IPV (Hamby, 2009; Hamby, 2016b, 2017a). Several studies have suggested that false positive reporting is common in some IPV measures (Ackerman, 2018; Arriaga, 2002; Fernández-González, O’Leary, & Muñoz-Rivas, 2013; Foshee, Bauman, Linder, Rice, & Wilcher, 2007; Gonzalez-Mendez & Hernandez-Cabrera, 2009; Jouriles, Garrido, Rosenfield, & McDonald, 2009; Lerhner & Allen, 2014). Recent research suggests that this problem is not limited to the CTS and other similar broadly-worded IPV checklists, but may also extend to sexual assault measures, which may also need efforts to increase item precision (Littleton, Layh, Rudolph, & Haney, online first).

The Partner Victimization Scale

The Partner Victimization Scale (PVS; Hamby, 2016a) is intended to filter out false positive responses. There are a variety of pushes and even hits that do not meet the definition of violence, such as those occurring during accidents, contact sports, and other settings, but prior research suggests that, especially for younger people, horseplay and joking around is a major source of these false positives. Violence requires the intentional commission of unwanted, unnecessary, and harmful acts (Hamby, 2017b).

Thus, each PVS item is prefaced with the clarification, “Not including horseplay or joking around...” The statement is not only intended to screen out behaviors such as play-wrestling, which are largely consensual and harmless behaviors, but also to better communicate that the disclosures are for aggressive, malicious behaviors. This phrase was chosen after consideration of some other alternatives, although other approaches to screening out false positives also reduce gender parity (see Hamby, 2016a and 2017a for other options). With such clarification, it is less likely for participants to be included incorrectly in the victimization count.

The original PVS study (Hamby, 2016a) was based on a sample of 1207 adults ranging from 18-70 years of age ($M = 33.4$ years; $SD = 11.2$ years) and 66% female-identified from a low-income region in rural Appalachia. In this sample, 34.1% of females reported any lifetime IPV victimization; 18.7% of males reported lifetime IPV victimization, indicating significantly higher female victimization and rates that were almost twice as high for women. Individual item rates ranged from 11.5% to 27.8% for women and 1.8% to 14.2% for men, showing significant gender asymmetry for each question (see Appendix for text of items). The first replication was also conducted by Hamby (2016b) in a sample of 614 drawn from the same region. Gender asymmetry was again found, although the reported rates were somewhat higher (44.5% for women and 30% for men). Each item again showed asymmetry, with females reporting higher victimization than males.

Monitoring the Campus Climate for Victimization Risk

Interest in IPV surveillance has recently increased considerably on college campuses, thanks to changes in Title IX guidance during the Obama administration. The collaborators of the Administrator Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3, 2015) sought to improve the surveillance of various types of misconduct, including IPV. They recommended a slightly adapted version of the PVS (details in Method) for universities using the ARC3 Campus Climate Survey, providing a potentially large pool of studies in a relatively short time period. This created an opportunity to examine the results of independent replications of gender patterns based on the PVS.

The purpose of this report is to review the gender patterns in independent replications based on the Partner Victimization Scale (Hamby 2016a,b).

Method

We reviewed multiple literature types for this report. We conducted two different literature searches. The first search specifically looked for campus climate surveys that used the ARC3 to measure dating violence. The second literature search reviewed those publications which have cited the Hamby, 2016 PVS paper.

Campus Climate Surveys

The ARC3 is the result of a collaborative group of sexual assault researchers and campus professionals seeking to develop an effective measure for campus climate surveys in response to the White House Task Force on Keeping Students Safe on Campus. The ARC3 is an effort to improve the quality of the data being collected in campus climate surveys. The items used in the ARC3 survey were derived from the PVS. We were aware that the PVS had been incorporated into the ARC3 because Kevin Swartout, one of the ARC3 researchers, contacted Hamby for permission to use the PVS in the ARC3. For the dating violence module, any affirmative response is coded as the participant having experienced or perpetrated IPV. The ARC3 and further information about the ARC3 project can be accessed through the collaborative's website:

<http://campusclimate.gsu.edu/>.

Each university has flexibility in whether they use the entire ARC3 and/or modify it in any way, but we still anticipated that these might be a source of PVS-based data. Each university can use the Georgia State University team (where ARC3 is based) as a resource, but those researchers are not typically directly involved in the data collection on any individual campus.

We conducted a systematic review of the literature using two search engines, Google Scholar and Bing, that include “gray” literature (reports and other documents published outside of traditional journals or books). Both searches were restricted to results published from 2015 to the present (after the PVS would have been available). We used two different search strings, which were modeled after ones developed by Krause et al. (in press) for a review of sexual assault rates. The first, (“campus climate survey” OR “title IX” OR “sexual violence” OR “sexual assault”) ~survey filetype:pdf site:edu, produced hits of 1760 in Google and 3360 in Bing. The second string, (“campus climate survey” OR “title IX” OR “sexual violence” OR “dating” OR “intimate partner” OR “relationship” OR “sexual assault”) ~survey filetype:pdf site:edu, resulted in hits of 20,800 in Google and 621,000 in Bing. Due to the large number of hits produced by these types of search engines, most of which do not include relevant data, we adopted a procedure developed in Hamby, Blount, et al. (2017), in which pages of “hits” were searched until an entire page of 10 hits yielded no relevant results. This resulted in reviewing 240 articles, producing rates for 33 campuses.

Data from surveys were included in this review if they provided rates of dating violence victimization for male and female participants, at a minimum. If available, rates are also provided for people who reported another gender identity (transgender or other gender non-conforming, TGNC).

Included surveys also needed to have the PVS exclusion criteria statement in their campus climate survey. Sites differed in where they included the statement about horseplay or joking; some schools stated it only in the instructions, whereas others kept it in front of each item, as in the original PVS format. Some campuses added additional questions on dating violence beyond what is included in the original PVS (see below). The referent period in the ARC3 survey is the time the participant has been a student on their current campus.

Independent Publications

For other uses of the PVS, we conducted a literature review of publications that cite the article from which the PVS originated (Hamby, 2016a), as indicated by Google Scholar in June, 2018. This resulted in 34 articles. To be included in this review, the publications needed to provide quantitative data on the PVS by independent authors that included rates of victimization for males and females. Three articles included data on victimization from studies conducted by independent authors, but two of these only included female victimization and one of them reported “modes” (the average number of items endorsed), not the rate (percentage of participants reporting at least one victimization). Thus, none of these studies met our inclusion criteria, but the three data-based ones are described briefly in results.

Results

Campus Climate Survey Findings

We found 13 universities or university systems that used the ARC3 for their campus climate survey, with the Penn State system including data from multiple campuses. This resulted in data from 33 campuses for this report. Sample sizes ranged from 61 (Dickinson Law campus of Penn State) to 6952 participants (University of Iowa,), with an average sample size of 1089.

The assessment of IPV varied somewhat across surveys. Several campuses added items to their IPV modules. Examples of these include items regarding sexual safety (“My partner refused to wear a condom when I wanted to”), psychological abuse (“My partner insisted on knowing where I was at all times” and “...tried to keep me from seeing or talking to friends and family”), and sexual orientation (“My partner threatened to disclose my sexual orientation against my will”). We included results of all surveys that retained the key PVS innovation, which is instructing respondents not to include any horseplay or joking around in their reports of violence. All campuses coded participants as having experienced IPV if they answered affirmatively to one or more items on the scale.

Although rates of IPV varied among campuses, in general female respondents reported higher victimization than their male peers (see Figure 1). Rates of female IPV victimization ranged from 0% of the female sample to 31%, with a pooled average of 18.0%; rates of male IPV victimization ranged from 0% of the male sample to 25.1%, with a pooled average of 10.6% (see Table 1). A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender and victimization. The relation between the variables was significant, $X^2(1, N = 29143) = 293.41, p < .0001$. Female-identifying participants were significantly more likely to be IPV victims than their male peers.

Figure 1. Pooled averages for IPV rates across 33 campuses that used the ARC3 survey, with more than 29,000 total respondents. See Table 1 for rates for males and females for each campus. See pages 12-13 for available information on transgender/gender non-conforming (TGNC) students.

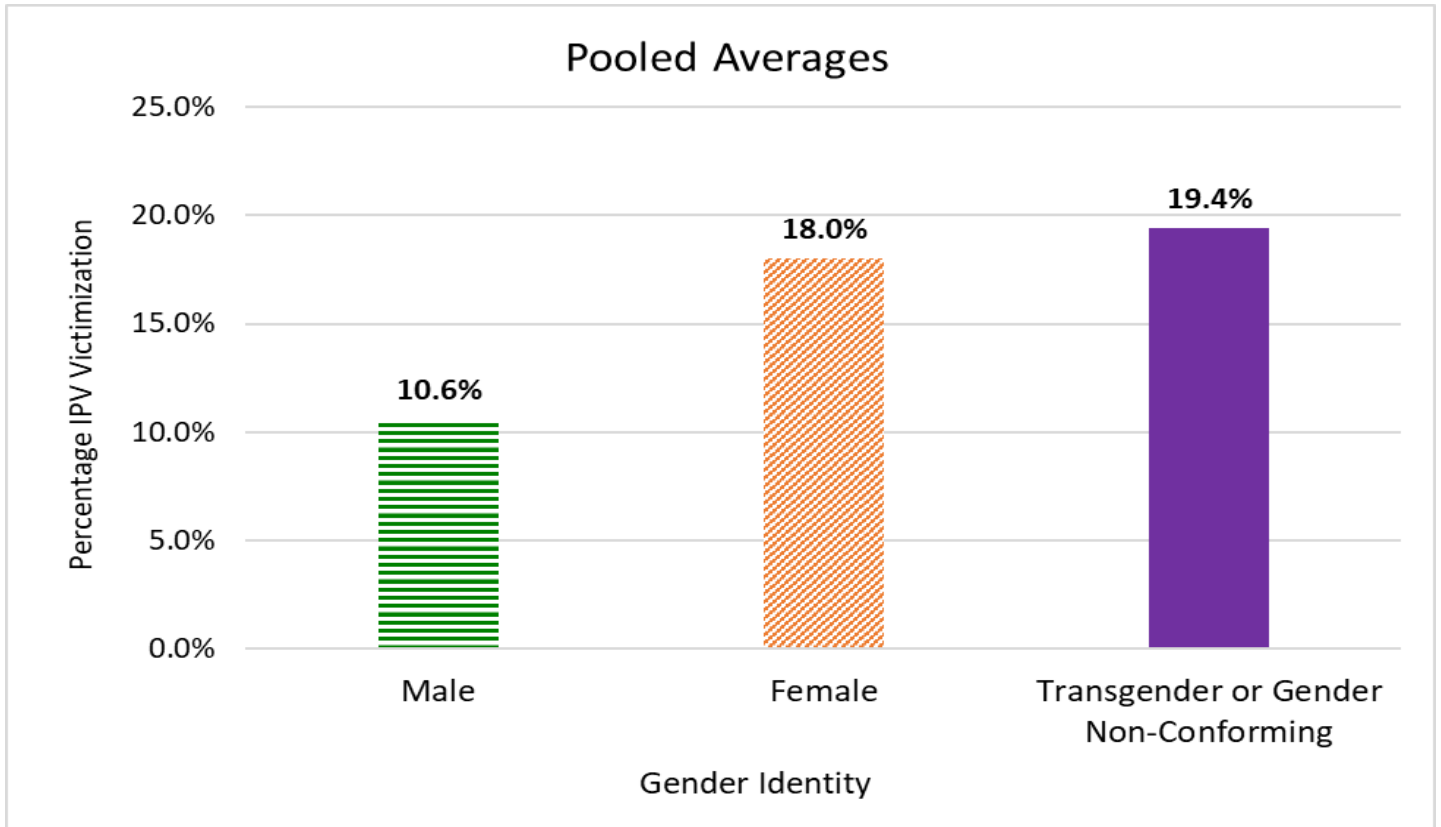


Table 1.

Victimization Rates for Females and Males from ARC3 Campus Climate Survey Sites

| Campus | Female % | n | Male % | n |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| U. Washington | 31.0% | 2683 | 25.1% | 1613 |
| U. Illinois | 26.1 | 1451 | 15.5 | 888 |
| Ferris State U. | 25.6 | 402 | 10.6 | 240 |
| Ohio U. | 22.4 | 1035 | 9.9 | 314 |
| Palm Beach Atlantic U. | 22.0 | 203 | 16.7 | 23 |
| Tulane U. | 18.5 | -- | 12.1 | -- |
| U. Iowa (2017) | 17.5 | 4728 | 10.3 | 2198 |
| U. Oregon | 12.8 | 824 | 6.4 | 477 |
| U. Iowa (2015) | 12.7 | 1972 | 5.7 | 711 |
| <i>Penn State Campuses</i> | | | | |
| University Park (Main campus) | 12.2 | 2460 | 7.1 | 2085 |
| Wilkes-Barre | 17.8 ^a | 44 | 5.8 ^a | 71 |
| Schuylkill | 14.1 | 98 | 7.7 ^a | 42 |
| Behrend | 11.7 | 182 | 7.6 | 268 |
| Berks | 11.2 | 186 | 7.1 | 184 |
| Harrisburg (Undergraduate) | 11.2 | 163 | 2.5 ^a | 170 |
| Abingdon | 10.7 | 159 | 3.8 ^a | 105 |
| Altoona | 10.1 | 208 | 3.0 ^a | 172 |
| York | 9.9 | 122 | 3.7 ^a | 112 |
| Payette | 9.9 ^a | 102 | 2.1 ^a | 50 |
| Greater Allegheny | 9.5 ^a | 63 | 5.0 ^a | 62 |
| Worthington Scranton | 9.1 ^a | 100 | 1.3 ^a | 77 |
| Lehigh Valley | 8.8 ^a | 91 | 1.3 ^a | 82 |
| Mont Alto | 8.4 ^a | 107 | 1.7 ^a | 60 |
| Harrisburg (Graduate) | 7.4 ^a | 96 | 2.8 ^a | 62 |
| Beaver | 7.1 ^a | 84 | 5.1 ^a | 78 |
| Shenango | 7.0 ^a | 71 | 0.0 ^a | 25 |
| Hershey | 6.6 | 229 | 2.8 ^a | 182 |
| Hazleton | 6.5 ^a | 109 | 4.2 ^a | 99 |
| Dickinson Law | 6.1 ^a | 31 | 3.9 ^a | 30 |
| DuBois | 5.5 ^a | 80 | 7.7 ^a | 67 |
| Brandywine | 4.6 ^a | 135 | 2.3 ^a | 129 |
| New Kensington | 4.2 ^a | 72 | 5.6 ^a | 89 |
| Great Valley | 0.0 ^a | 38 | 0.0 ^a | 50 |
| Sample sizes for each gender | -- | 18328 | -- | 10815 |
| Pooled rate | 18.0% | 3302 | 10.6% | 1141 |

Chi-square = 293.41, $p < .0001$.

Notes. Participants were considered an IPV victim if they provided 1 or more affirmative responses to IPV questions. Tulane omitted from chi-square analysis due to lack of sample size information. Sites often modified items from the original PVS, but all of these sites retained the key PVS innovation, which is instructing participants to omit incidents involving horseplay or joking around.

^a Victimization rate estimate based on 10 or fewer participants reporting victimization, interpret with caution.

IPV Rates for Graduate vs Undergraduate Students

The higher rates of female victimization were not limited to traditionally aged college students (18 to 22 years). This is best illustrated by the schools that reported data for both graduate and undergraduate students, providing rates of victimization for two distinct age groups. In both graduate (Figure 2) and undergraduate surveys (Figure 3), female respondents reported more victimization than males. Graduate females reported a victimization rate of 11.0% (Oregon), 7.4% (Penn State – Harrisburg), and 9.2% (Penn State – University Park). In comparison, male graduate students reported lower rates of victimization – 7.0% (Oregon), 2.8% (Penn State – Harrisburg), and 4.9% (Penn State).

Figure 2.

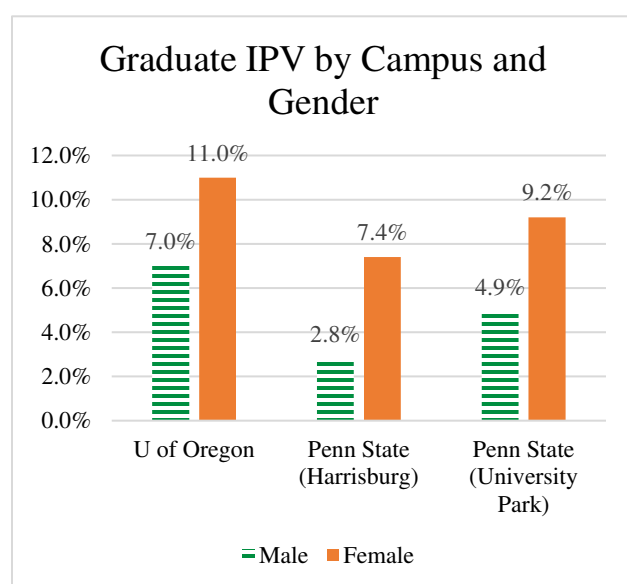
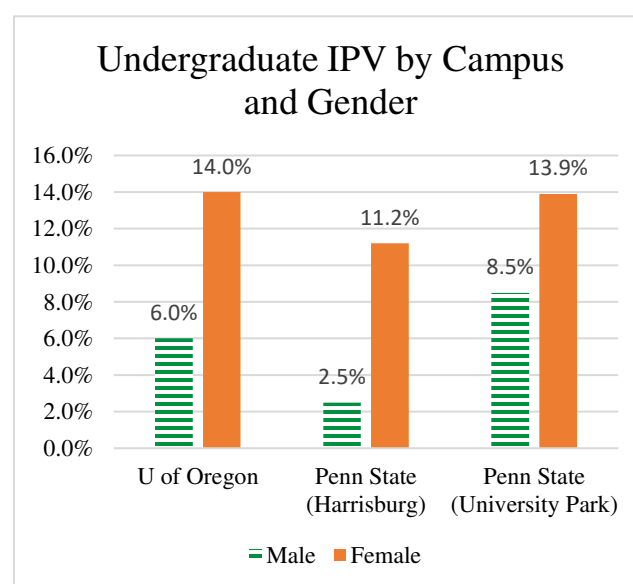


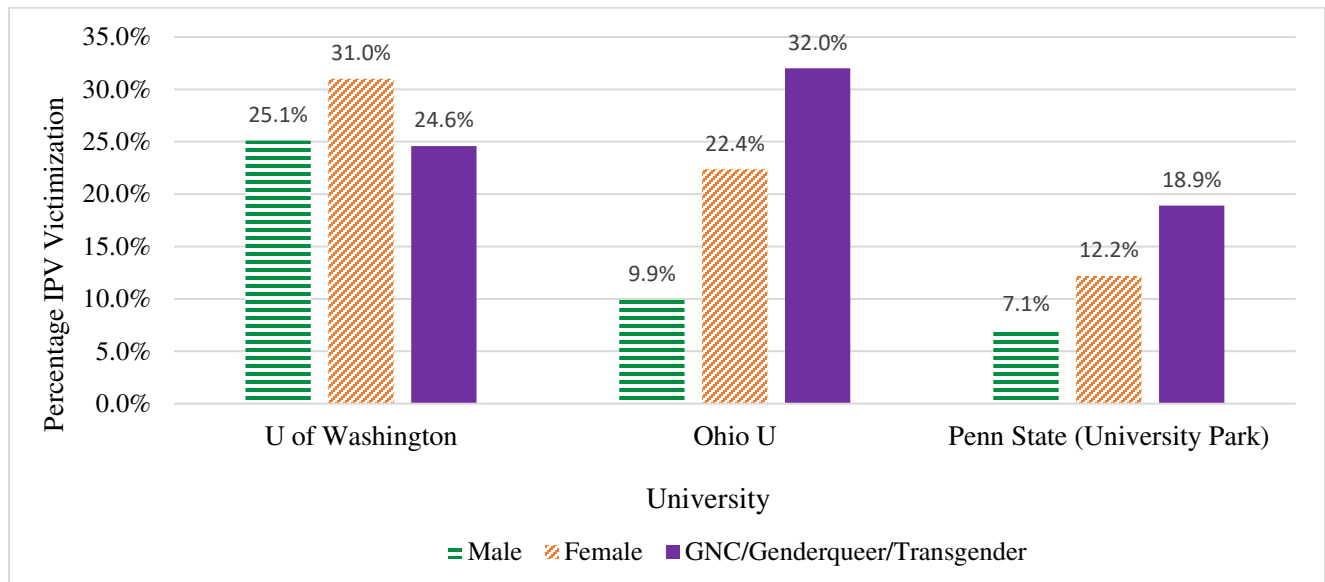
Figure 3.



IPV Victimization Across the Gender Identity Spectrum

Only three campuses reported data for transgender, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming (TGNC) students. Although sample sizes for TGNC participants were small (range 25 to 75), they reported the highest rates at two of the three campuses. The lowest rate of victimization was 18.9% of the TGNC sample; the highest rate was 32.0%. As seen in Figure 1, the pooled rate for these campuses was 19.4%, slightly higher than the pooled rates for female-identified students and almost twice as high as the rate for male-identified students. More inclusive measures of gender are needed in future research.

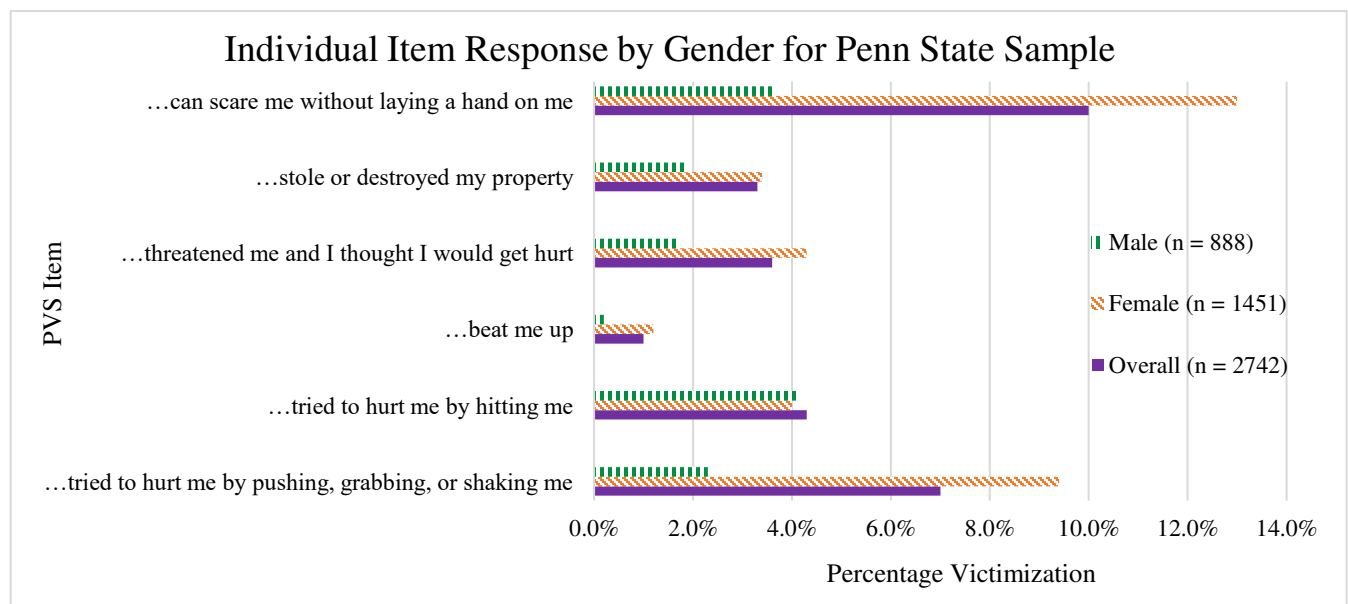
Figure 4. Victimization rates for campuses including transgender or gender non-conforming as a gender identity.



Item-level Data

Penn State at University Park also included a breakdown of each item in their IPV module (Figure 5). Each item demonstrated gender asymmetry except for “...tried to hurt me by hitting me.”

Figure 5.



Other Replication Findings

We were able to find three other independent studies that used the PVS with their samples. As noted in the Method, two of the studies only reported data on female participants (Schultz, 2016; Woerner, 2017). Woerner also reported only the average number of acts endorsed, no rates.

Notably, Schultz's study was a national sample of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), providing some evidence of reliability and validity for use with native communities. That study showed a 42% IPV victimization rate ($n = 755$, $N = 1810$), the highest of the female victimization rates included in this review.

Rosenthal, Smidt, and Freyd (2016) did not report rates for dating violence, but for all types of sexual and intimate victimization, 70% of women reported at least one form of sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, or dating violence, compared to 54% of men. Because this rate is not directly comparable to the IPV rates in the campus climate surveys, it was not included in the pooled average. However, the rate still suggests asymmetry in sexual and intimate victimization.

Discussion

This review provides further evidence that efforts to reduce false positives in IPV self-report produce rates indicating more female than male victimization. Although some other self-report surveys have also found gender asymmetry, the reasons for the discrepancies across self-report surveys has not been well understood (Hamby, 2017a). These results provide a measurement approach that aligns with other indicators of IPV, including homicides, arrests, reports to police (whether they result in arrest or not), witness reports, and help-seeking data, all of which consistently indicate higher rates of female than male victimization.

Further, these results suggest that many different questions can be used under the general framework of instructing participants not to report incidents involving horseplay or joking around. Several sites added some questions, re-worded PVS questions, and/or moved the instruction to omit horseplay and joking around from the item stem (beginning of each item) to the general instructions for the scale. For the most part as long as that essential element was included, gender symmetry was not found. Although not strict replications of the PVS study, these modifications indicate that the PVS pattern is robust to these types of modifications. It appears that the gender patterns observed are not specific to the wording of the PVS items, but rather the general effort to reduce false positives is accounting for the gender asymmetry in observed rates.

A few other observations can be offered. Small samples under 200 participants—and especially those under 100 participants—tended to produce the lowest estimates. Of the 16 campuses with rates under 10% for females, 15 of them had sample sizes under 150 female participants. Similarly, of the 15 campuses with rates under 5% for males, 12 of those had sample sizes of under 150 male participants. This suggests that these rates may be unstable, especially for men, with several rates based on fewer than 10 victims. Even beyond size, sampling may be an issue. Some schools may be struggling to recruit their most at-risk students into campus climate surveys. Some of these schools also produced similar rates for males and females, with one survey of 88 participants even producing a rate of 0% for males and females (which is unlikely to be a correct estimate of the true population parameter). The difference between these findings and those from the larger samples, which never showed gender symmetry, are striking and illustrate the importance of adequate sample sizes to measure phenomena that have relatively low base rates, from a statistical point of view, even though they represent significant public health problems in terms of the burden on individuals and communities.

The pooled averages in this report are similar to those found among a national high school sample in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS; Vagi, O'Malley Olsen, Basile, & Vivolo-Kantor, 2015). As in these replications, female victimization was much higher than male victimization. In Vagi et al., female high schoolers had a victimization rate of 20.9% and the male peers had a rate of 10.4%. In the YRBS, an annual CDC survey, asymmetry was found only after the YRBS was reworded to operationalize concepts like intent and harm (Vagi, O'Malley Olsen, Basile, & Vivolo-Kantor). Previously, the YRBS found gender symmetry, from what appears now to be due to the overly broad wording of earlier items.

The data about graduate versus undergraduate rates of IPV victimization provides a few interesting insights. Primarily, the continuation of gender asymmetry in the graduate sample suggests that higher rates of female victimization are not limited to a young, undergraduate sample. This was consistent with the findings of the original PVS study and first replication, which were also conducted on older samples (Hamby, 2016a,b).

Future directions include expanding gender identity categories beyond male and female. Only a few sites included other options in this review. In the few samples reporting TGNC data, they reported far higher victimization rates than either male-identified or female-identified students. Further study of this demographic could prove useful to the question of gender parity and IPV victimization risks.

Limitations

The PVS and ARC3 are both relatively new and hopefully new approaches to measuring intimate partner violence will continue. Due to the inclusion of PVS items in the ARC3, there have already been several studies conducted, but almost all of them have been with college student populations, except for the original PVS sample and Hamby's replication. More diverse samples are needed.

Unfortunately, Title IX guidelines do not suggest standardized reporting methods, which resulted in a wide variety of reporting methods, lengths, styles, and detail. Whereas some campuses provided a more academic report of results, others included a simplified executive summary or key points presentation. We were not able to access information for many universities.

Conclusions

Overall, these campus climate surveys indicate higher female IPV victimization than male IPV victimization. Providing accurate assessments, particularly when the results of the research are needed to guide prevention, intervention, and policy, is crucial for violence research. These new efforts to more accurately monitor intimate partner violence on college campuses are an important step toward an improved understanding of IPV and will hopefully allow us to more effectively prevent IPV in the future.

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* denotes source of campus climate survey providing data for the current study

Campus Climate Surveys:

[University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#)

[University of Oregon](#)

[University of North Texas](#)

[Ferris State University](#)

[University of Washington](#)

[University of Iowa \(2015\)](#)

[University of Iowa \(2017\)](#)

[Ohio University](#)

[Penn State](#)

[Abington](#)

[Behrend](#)

[Dickinson Law](#)

[Great Valley](#)

[Hazleton](#)

[Mont Alto](#)

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[Hershey](#)

[New Kensington](#)

[University Park***](#)

[York](#)

[Beaver](#)

[Brandywine](#)

[Fayette](#)

[Harrisburg](#)

[Lehigh Valley](#)

[Schuykill](#)

[Wilkes-Barre](#)

Note. *** Main campus, largest sample

[Tulane University](#)

[Midwestern State University](#)

[Palm Beach Atlantic University](#)

Appendix

Partner Victimization Scale (PVS)

Answer the next questions about any boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife you have had, including exes.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Not including horseplay or joking around, my partner threatened to hurt me and I thought I might really get hurt. | |
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |
| 2. Not including horseplay or joking around, my partner pushed, grabbed, or shook me. | |
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |
| 3. Not including horseplay or joking around, my partner hit me. | |
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |
| 4. Not including horseplay or joking around, my partner beat me up. | |
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |
| 5. My partner made me do sexual things when I didn't want to. | |
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

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