

Assessment of suicide risk in intimate partner abuse: a cross cultural comparison

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Pamela Ritchie is a second year Doctoral Research Student within the School of Health and Social Care at Edinburgh Napier University. Her thesis is investigating “An examination of the assessment of vulnerability for suicide for those who have experienced intimate partner abuse: A cross cultural comparison between Hong Kong and Scotland” and is funded through a Peter KK Lee Scholarship. Pamela’s supervision team comprises Dr. Jennifer Murray (Director of Studies; member of the SIPR Evidence and Investigation Network), Dr. Elizabeth Aston (Director of SIPR), and Dr. Rory McLean. Pamela holds an MSc in Psychology and Mental Health and a BA (Hons) in Social Sciences: Specialism Psychology. Pamela is a former representative for the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR); where she established the Edinburgh Universities Groupings Network. Before beginning her PhD, Pamela was a researcher with the Medical Research Council on a number of interdisciplinary studies, including the: Gay Men’s Sexual Health Survey; Social Emotional Educational Development Project; GoWell Longitudinal Research Study; and the Football Fans In Training Study. She has previously volunteered at the Army Barracks in Collington, assisting Army Personnel as a mentor and as a befriender to those in the Learning Centre and the Personal Recovery Centre. In June 2019 Pamela presented her work at the International Association of Forensic Mental Health Services Conference in Canada, and this presentation helped to form the basis on which to develop the poster that she created for the SIPR PG conference in 2019. The research which Pamela has carried out today has focused on synthesising the literatures on Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA), vulnerability to suicide, and frontline responder responses to these across cultures. To conduct research into Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA), it was essential to first underpin the vocabulary used and the significance of the differences between language and countries, using the more globally accepted terminology of ‘Domestic Abuse’. There are many proposed definitions and terms that are used globally when discussing Domestic Abuse. Domestic Abuse refers to all associated behaviours that occur within an intimate relationship which causes, physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship (WHO, 2012). Domestic Abuse can also be termed Intimate Partner Violence or, indeed, IPA as a relatively new definition. IPA can be defined as any “incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners, regardless of gender or sexuality” (Department of Health, 2000). There are many challenges in proposing the best definition when addressing the topic of Partner Violence; earlier research into this violence only accounted for cases of a female victim with a male perpetrator and did not factor in same sex couples or female perpetrators. The recent introduction of The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act (2018) which came into force 1st April 2019, has provided Police Scotland the greatest legal powers to arrest and convict perpetrators of domestic abuse. This Domestic Abuse Act is the first of its kind to be introduced in Scotland to allow the judicial system the powers to arrest and convict perpetrators for coercive and controlling behaviour; a type of Domestic Abuse that has previously not been formally recognised within law enforcement and public health (Scottish Government 2018; Police Scotland 2016). Despite the use of the term ‘Domestic Abuse’, within Scotland, any form of familial or inter-family abuse is not considered when discussing this Act or indeed any conviction that is imposed on a perpetrator of these forms of abuse. This Act is solely for the purpose of IPA. It is a terminology that Police Scotland would like to formally use, as it is the most appropriate term when discussing abuse that occurs within an intimate relationship. IPA fully encapsulates all aspects of abuse, including the use of psychological harm, which comprises coercive and controlling behaviours; that happens to victims and is often more challenging to

evidence. For the purposes of the current research, the most appropriate terminology to employ is that which is also proposed by Police Scotland: IPA. With the establishment of a definition of IPA acceptable to both the practice-focus and the academic aspects of the current PhD established, the planning and data collection can now begin. The current research will explore the lived experience of frontline responders in Scotland and in Hong Kong when they are responding to victims of IPA, and will explore their experiences of assessing risk and risk of suicide with this group.

Globally, there have been very few studies conducted to date that illustrates the correlation between intimate partner abuse and the risk for suicide. The literature that does exist is weighted in reference to antenatal care, postpartum females, adolescents and male perpetrators as those who die by suicide. This literature, however, provides an unwavering indication of the public health issue that is continuing to rise on a global scale. For instance, Pengpid et al. (2018) concluded that women who were sexually assaulted demonstrated a high possibility of reporting threatened or attempted suicide, further demonstrating a requirement for in-depth research to be conducted when addressing the challenges surrounding suicidality and intimate partner abuse. Similarly, McLaughlin et al. () concluded that their findings demonstrate the strong association between IPA and suicidality. The association between IPA and the impact on a victim's Mental Health are widely reported in Asian communities. Research conducted in India, South Korea and China all conveyed a strong correlation between physical and sexual abuse on victims' mental health. Emery et al. (2016) placed emphasis on the dangerous levels of IPA within China. It is therefore clear that victims of IPA across both Scotland and Hong Kong are at high risk of suicide, but there is a dearth of published research exploring this from either the victim or the frontline responders' perspective.

The current research will therefore carry out a documentary analysis on grey literature on how (or if) frontline responders assess risk for suicide in victims of IPA and will carry out in depth one to one interviews with frontline responders (police and ambulance staff) to learn more from their tacit knowledge in this area and their lived experiences. This will be carried out for both Scottish and Hong Kong contexts. Ultimately the research hopes to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses across professions and shared understandings of the assessment for vulnerability of suicide when addressing intimate partner abuse victims to enrich and inform a unified best practice approach. The research will result in a greater insight into first responders' experiences of attending IPA calls and how they assess the risk for suicide in victims of IPA across cultures and professions.