THE ASSESSMENT OF IMPULSIVITY AND AGGRESSION AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO VICTIM PERCEPTION RISK IN DOMESTIC ABUSE

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OVERVIEW

- Background of PhD
- Impulsivity and Aggression
- Risk assessing
- Research questions
- Phases of study
- Summary

VICTIM JUDGEMENTS OF RISK

The research literature argues both for and against victim accuracy in assessing risk of harm.

- Victims as the expert of the abuser and attuned to their behaviours and cycles of violence (Hart & Gondolf, 1994; Weiss, Tolman, & Saunders, 2000; De Becker, 1994)

- Victim trauma means they minimise the danger in order to cope with the abuse, as well as affecting their confidence in the legitimacy of their insights (e.g. Dutton & Lorrie, 1997; Campbell, 1995).
Impulsivity
A tendency to act on the spur of the moment, without planning or a clear sense of decision or desire, or without deliberation (Carver, 2005; Shapiro, 1965)
- Cognitive (such as making quick decisions)
- Motor (acting without thinking)
- Non-planning (lack of forethought)
(Barratt, e.g. 1985)

Aggression
A goal-directed motor behaviour that has a deliberate intent to harm or injure another object or person (Berkowitz, 1993)

Physical aggression
Verbal aggression
Hostility
Anger
(Buss-Perry, e.g. 1992)

BACKGROUND
- Relationship between aggression and impulsivity (Hollander & Stein, 1995; Farrington, 1991), and impulsivity can reliably distinguish offenders from non-offenders (Smith & Waterman, 2006; Patone & Hennessy, 1996)
- Previous research has found raised levels of both impulsivity and aggression in the personalities of perpetrators of domestic abuse (Edwards, Scuff, Yerkes, Patel, & Patterson, 2003; Flesher & DuPont, 1998; Shoney, Braskett, Nebres & Sturt, 2011)
- Vast amount of theories posed over the years of domestic abuse, which shows some overlaps in aggression and impulsivity theories

BACKGROUND – ASSESSING RISK
• Multiple sources of information, including measures of personality (Whitemore & Kopp, 2002)
• Example: Spousal assault risk assessment (SARA) - 20 items, to be used on perpetrator and victims
  - measures anger and impulsivity via perpetrators directly
What about when a person approaches a service and discloses?
BACKGROUND – ASSESSING RISK

- UK Family practitioners and police current practice:
  
  Domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence (DASH) risk identification checklist (RIC)
  
  - Complements current statutory approaches and informs MARAC meetings
  - Assessment done with the adult victim only using a checklist of widely known risk factors
  - Does not assess victim’s perception of aggression and impulsivity of their abuser

Children

- Children focus:
  - What can they tell us?
  - Play therapy and information gathering.
  - Along with adult’s risk assessment, can the children contribute?
  
  “Child centered assessment is the direct inclusion, where appropriate, of the child... where research with children highlights their need to be listened to and included in the decisions affecting their lives” (Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008, p. 807)
**THESIS AIMS**

Impulsivity and aggression levels are currently not measured in victim perception risk assessments, such as the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour' Based Violence - Risk Identification Checklist (DASH-RIC).

Multiple sources suggested, but current focus is on adult victim only, with a risk factors checklist.

- **Aims:** Inform victim-perception risk assessments in two ways:
  1. Explore perpetrator personality constructs reported by the victim (aggression and impulsivity)
  2. Explore the potential contribution of child victim accounts
- **Mixed methods study**

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What is the experience of risk in domestic abuse for victims/survivors?
- What are the theoretical relationships between victim observed aggression, impulsivity and domestic abuse?
- Are the above relationships predictive of risk in domestic abuse?
- Are victims/survivors able to identify aggression and impulsivity and the risks these present to themselves and their children?

**EXPLORATION OF RISK IN DOMESTIC ABUSE**

- Three phases of study using mixed methods:
  - Study 1: Qualitative, interviews with adult survivors
  - Study 2: Quantitative, questionnaires with students & general population
  - Study 3: Qualitative case study, narrative interview with survivor and their children
- Ethical approval
- Sensitive research
- Recruitment
PHASE ONE – QUALITATIVE STUDY WITH SURVIVORS

- Semi-structured interviews with survivors of domestic abuse (n=6)
- Recruited from a brief domestic abuse survey at Leeds Trinity University
- Exploration of the lived experience of risk in domestic abuse using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
- Five emergent superordinate themes

INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA)

- Phenomenology
  - Participant as the expert of the phenomenon
  - Lifeworld of the participant
  - Bracketing
- Idiographic
- Interpretation
  - Double hermeneutic and the hermeneutic circle
- Development of themes, sub themes then superordinate themes
EMERGENT THEMES

Superordinate Themes
Concepts of self, and relationships with others
- "Confined, locked away from other people, and isolated"

Recollections of abuse behaviors
- She recalls standing in the street with her head down:
  "Powers of the inside"
- "Trapped within"

Psychological trauma
- "Power and control"
- "Anger and aggressive behavior"
- "Significance of mother as both a barrier and route to safety"
- "Emotional confusion"

Meta-awareness of risk, and actions of managing it
- "Hidden children"
- "Sensing abuser's dangerousness"

Subordinate Themes
- "Self-knowledge"
- "Romance and attraction experiences"
- "Significance of mother as both a barrier and route to safety"
- "Coercion, manipulation, emotional abuse"
- "Power and control"
- "Anger and aggressive behavior"
- "Disempowered via control"
- "Coerced, leading to feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame"
- "Emotional confusion"
- "Long term, and ongoing, impact of abuse"
- "Heightened awareness of risk, and actions of managing it"

Partner's characteristics as intense and troubling
- "Impulsive behaviors"
- "Alcohol and drug-taking"
- "Troubling relationship with own family"

RISK

"You never knew when, but you knew it was going to happen at some point. You just didn't know what." (Charlotte)

"I was not comfortable to leave him alone with the children whatsoever, at all" (Berta)

Everything became about keeping him happy, keeping him calm... (Elena)

AGGRESSION AND IMPULSIVITY

"He was always you never knew, "he was always you never knew, you never knew what he was like"..." (Charlotte)

"There's lots of incidences where he'd been to work, and then be somewhere else acquiring the city centre before coming home. And if things went badly, he would just come home drunk and say you can't do this, you can't do that because you know..." (Elena)

"He got really aggressive and he'd grab me and bang me against the wall. It was the first time that he'd ever hurt me like that and I don't think he was doing it to hurt me, I think he was just so frustrated..." (Yasmine)

"He would just be like a buried animal in the sand and he would just burst out of the sand..." (Charlotte)

"He was always you never knew, you never knew what he was like..." (Charlotte)
**SIGNIFICANCE OF MOTHER**

“I had to walk and I literally ran from his flat when he let me out. I had to call a friend to get me a taxi, because I couldn’t call my mum, she knew I was with him but she didn’t know. I didn’t even think that I could talk to her, at all”

(Charlotte)

“The only reason I got rid of her [abusive partner] was because of my mum. My mum was the only reason that she left”

(Lyndsey)

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**Phase One – Summary**

**Phase Two – Questionnaire Study**

- **113 participants.**
  - Ages from 18 to 70 (M=30.38, SD=12.68). 95 (84.1%) females and 18 (15.9%) males.

- Each participant was instructed to report on their current, or most recent, partner within the questionnaire.
  - Ages of partners ranged from 16 to 78 (M=31.31, SD=13.01) 24 (21.2%) females and 89 (78.8%) males.
**METHOD**

- Battery of questionnaires distributed in general population and Leeds Trinity University. Eligibility was to be over 18 and to have had at least one partner.
  
- Self-report and reports of partner
  - Barratt Impulsivity Scale (BIS)
  - Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ)
  - Aggressive Acts Questionnaire (AAQ)

- Self-report only
  - Domestic abuse survey (incl. items on DA and CC experience)
  - Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Identification Tool (DASH RIC)

**FINDINGS – EXPERIENCES OF COERCIVE CONTROL AND DOMESTIC ABUSE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES (NOT FROM CURRENT OR MOST RECENT PARTNER)</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES (FROM CURRENT OR MOST RECENT PARTNER)</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CORRELATIONS OF BIS, BPAQ & AAQ**

- Self-report:
  - BIS (M = 61.81, SD = 8.82) and the BPAQ (M = 64.05, SD = 16.48), \( r (113) = .21, p < .05 \).

- Reports on their partners:
  - BIS (M = 66.84, SD = 12.95) and the BPAQ (M = 69.75, SD = 25.28), \( r (113) = .55, p < .01 \).
  - BPAQ (M = 69.75, SD = 25.28) and the AAQ (M = 104.83, SD = 56.31), \( r (43) = .52, p < .01 \).
  - BIS (M = 66.84, SD = 12.95) and the AAQ (M = 104.83, SD = 56.31), \( r (43) = .34, p < .05 \).
### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BIS, BPAQ & AAQ AND THE DASH-RIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Partner</th>
<th>DASH-RIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIS Motor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Cognitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Non-Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAQ Physical Aggression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAQ Verbal Aggression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAQ Hostility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Non-Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Motor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Total Score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant own score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BIS** = Barratt Impulsivity Scale.

**AAQ** = Aggressive Acts Questionnaire.

**BPAQ** = Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire.

DASH-RIC = Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour' Victim/Survivor of Violence Checklist.

### DIFFERENCES IN SCORES – IMPLICIVITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Victim/Survivor of CC/DA</th>
<th>Victim/Survivor of CC/DA</th>
<th>Means/Whitney U Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant own score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Total Score</td>
<td>80.91</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Motor</td>
<td>15.92</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Cognitive</td>
<td>15.92</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS Non-Planning</td>
<td>25.52</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BIS** = Barratt Impulsivity Scale.

**BPAQ** = Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire.

**AAQ** = Aggressive Acts Questionnaire.

Mann-Whitney U test

* = p < 0.05
** = p < 0.01

### DIFFERENCES IN SCORES – AGGRESSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Victim/Survivor of CC/DA</th>
<th>Victim/Survivor of CC/DA</th>
<th>Means/Whitney U Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant own score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAQ Total Score</td>
<td>40.59</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAQ Physical Aggression</td>
<td>18.24</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAQ Verbal Aggression</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAQ Hostility</td>
<td>25.48</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BPAQ** = Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire.

**AAQ** = Aggressive Acts Questionnaire.

Mann-Whitney U test

* = p < 0.05
** = p < 0.01
DIFFERENCES IN SCORES – AGGRESSIVE ACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant sub-score</th>
<th>Non-Victim/Survivor of CC/DA (N=20)</th>
<th>Victim/Survivor of CC/DA (N=13)</th>
<th>Mann-Whitney U test</th>
<th>Mean SD Median Range</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAQ Total Score</td>
<td>73.95 41.89 52 14 1 114.85 67.64 100 181</td>
<td>84.5 -1.68 .05 * .09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAQ Impulsive Aggression</td>
<td>27.2 16.95 21 62 43.31 25.95 41 79 80</td>
<td>27.5 -1.85 .03 * .11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAQ Mood</td>
<td>20.80 13.80 14.50 48</td>
<td>32.62 19.07 26 52 81</td>
<td>21.8 -3.20 .001** .29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAQ Premeditated Aggression</td>
<td>10.75 4.35 9.5 13</td>
<td>15.38 8.46 13 22 100.5</td>
<td>21.8 -1.10 .14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAQ Agitation</td>
<td>15.2 8.54 10 28</td>
<td>23.54 15.27 20 40 103.5</td>
<td>21.8 -3.981 .16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

PHASE THREE – SURVIVOR FAMILY CASE STUDY

- Exploration of parent/child experiences and dynamics
- Children’s awareness of domestic abuse
- Narrative inquiry
- Play techniques

SUMMARY

- Victims/survivors have ability to judge aggression and impulsivity in abuser
- Currently used risk assessment (DASH-RIC) correlates with impulsivity and aggression
- Victims/survivors self-reported higher scores on some factors of aggression and aggressive acts, and also on cognitive impulsivity – effects of abuse

BIS = Barratt Impulsivity Scale
BPAQ = Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire
AAQ = Aggressive Acts Questionnaire
**THE FAMILY**

- Rebecca (27) - White British
- Ismail (in twenties) - Asian Muslim

**ADULT SURVIVOR THEMES - REBECCA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mother's Acknowledgement of</td>
<td>a. The journey towards understanding her children's view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk in Children</td>
<td>b. Children's explicit and proactive interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Acknowledging Risk</td>
<td>a. Risk perception as a situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Observing the signs of dangerousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Impulsivity &amp; Aggression</td>
<td>a. The blunted perceptions of impulsivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. The effects of dependency on acknowledging aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other Emergent Themes</td>
<td>a. Reflection on accommodating the abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. The transition from rejection to acceptance of parental intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHILD OBSERVATIONS**

- Children’s natural language is play (Landreth, 2002)
- Sand trays are widely used by play therapists as a technique (e.g. Ennis & Kasai, 2003; Grebbia, 1994; Kallf, 2003)
- Rarely used as a tool for gathering research data
THOUGHTS?

THEMES

ZACH
- Ambivalence towards ‘daddy’ [Mullender et al, 2002; Peled, 2000]
- Safety concerns [Cook, 2003; Georgsson, Almqvist, & Broberg, 2011]
- Retelling brother’s narrative
- Fearful of father [Clark, 2003; Matchett, 1997; Clements, 1996]

ALFIE
- Destruction of the step-father’s identity
- Loss and isolation [Hart, Brassard & Karlson, 1996; Holden, 2003]
- Powerful anger [Lundy and Grossman, 2005]
OVERALL SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS IN THREE PHASES OF STUDY

- Evidence that domestic abuse victims are able to make judgements on partners' impulsivity and aggression levels.
- Victim observed aggression, impulsivity and domestic abuse reflect the links in the research literature on perpetrator self-reports.
- Risk 'feelings' and risk management for further exploration.
- Importance of child recollections, and use of play as a non-intrusive/indirect technique.
- Results informs currently used risk assessments.
- Further research needed, e.g. larger samples, couple comparisons.

Thanks for listening

- Any questions?