

'I would never put up with that': Identification with the aggressor as a barrier to relationship termination and supporting prosecution for victims of intimate partner violence

An anonymous 30-minute survey assessing current procedures/policies used to safeguard domestic abuse victims.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Chichester
Principal researcher(s)	Amber Leeson aleeson1@stu.chi.ac.uk
Police region	South East
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	June 2025
Date due for completion	September 2025

Research context

This project has several aims, with the overarching aim being to study how Identification with the Aggressor (IWA) affects victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) – specifically, the victim's ability to leave their abusive partner and/or support a police prosecution against their partner. Research has revealed that leaving an abusive relationship is a process and not a single event (Saunders 2021, cited in Handbook of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Across the Lifespan, 2022). Many factors, such as income, fear of further violence, love, social stereotypes, children, pregnancy and social isolation have been explored in relation to why victims of IPV do not leave (Heron and others 2022, Lahav 2022). However, research has expanded and found evidence that an unconscious

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trauma response aimed at promoting survival, known as Identification with Aggressor (IWA), impacts a victim's ability to leave their abusive partner (Lahav 2022).

Despite there being a wealth of research investigating victims of IPV, there is a lack of qualitative methods used to understand how IWA is lived and experienced by victims of IPV and if IWA plays a role in a victim's decision to support a police prosecution.

The police's perspective is limited within this field of research. It is believed that police officers have valuable input to how to protect victims and conduct research in the safest way possible. They can also provide their perspective on the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool, created to assist the police and partnering agencies to assess the risk to the victim (College of Policing 2016).

Study one will aim to explore current/previous police officer's thoughts feelings and perspectives on current risk assessing and safeguarding procedures used when attending a domestic abuse incident involving intimate partners.

Research methodology

The project will begin in June 2025 with a recruitment post being shared on LinkedIn, with a link to the online anonymous questionnaire. Participants can volunteer to complete this questionnaire if they meet the following criteria:

- they must be a current or former police officer or police staff
- they must have performed a job role where they attended domestic incidents and used the DASH risk assessment

The questionnaire will be available on JASP and will ask participants several questions that will be a mixture of open, closed and Likert scale. This is estimated to take 30 minutes. The questions have been designed by the researcher, and so no pre-validated measures are included.

Data collection will end in August 2025. Data analysis will include a mixture of descriptive and content analysis for the fixed questions, as thematic analysis for open-ended questions. Data analysis is predicted to last four weeks.

Research participation

[Participate in the survey](#)

[Contact the researcher for further information](#)

References

College of Policing. 2016. [Risk-led policing of domestic abuse and the DASH risk model](#).

Heron RL, Eisma M and Browne K. 2022. ['Why do female domestic violence victims remain in or leave abusive relationships? A qualitative study'](#). Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 31(5), pp 677–694.

Lahav Y. 2022. ['Hyper-sensitivity to the perpetrator and the likelihood of returning to abusive relationships'](#), Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 38(1–2), pp. 1815–1841.

Saunders DG. 2021. 'Barriers to leaving an abusive relationship'. In: 'Handbook of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Across the Lifespan: A project of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan (NPEIV)', pp 2841–2863. Cham: Springer International Publishing.