

Moderating Effect of Perceived Social Support on Intimate Partner Violence Severity and Help Seeking Behaviors

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- Help seeking behaviors play a role in buffering the negative effects of violent crime victimization.¹
- Factors that predict help seeking behaviors among survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) can be used to identify those who are less likely to seek out help after an IPV incident.
 - Survivors of IPV are more likely to engage in help seeking behaviors after more severe violent incidents.^{2,3,4,5}
 - Research on help seeking behaviors in survivors of IPV has focused on appraisals of the relationship and violence, characteristics of the relationship, and how others respond after hearing about the IPV.⁵
- Although women most often rely on friends and family after IPV for help,⁶ little is known about whether women's perceived social support affects her help seeking behavior.
- Exploring the possible moderating effect of perceived social support on help seeking behavior for women who have experienced IPV may provide important contextual information regarding help seeking behavior for survivors of IPV.

Study Purpose and Hypothesis

Data were collected from women who had recently survived an instance of IPV. Severity of the incident, perceived social support, and the number of help seeking behaviors after the incident were collected.

The following hypothesis was tested:

Perceived social support was predicted to moderate the relationship between abuse severity and help seeking behaviors.

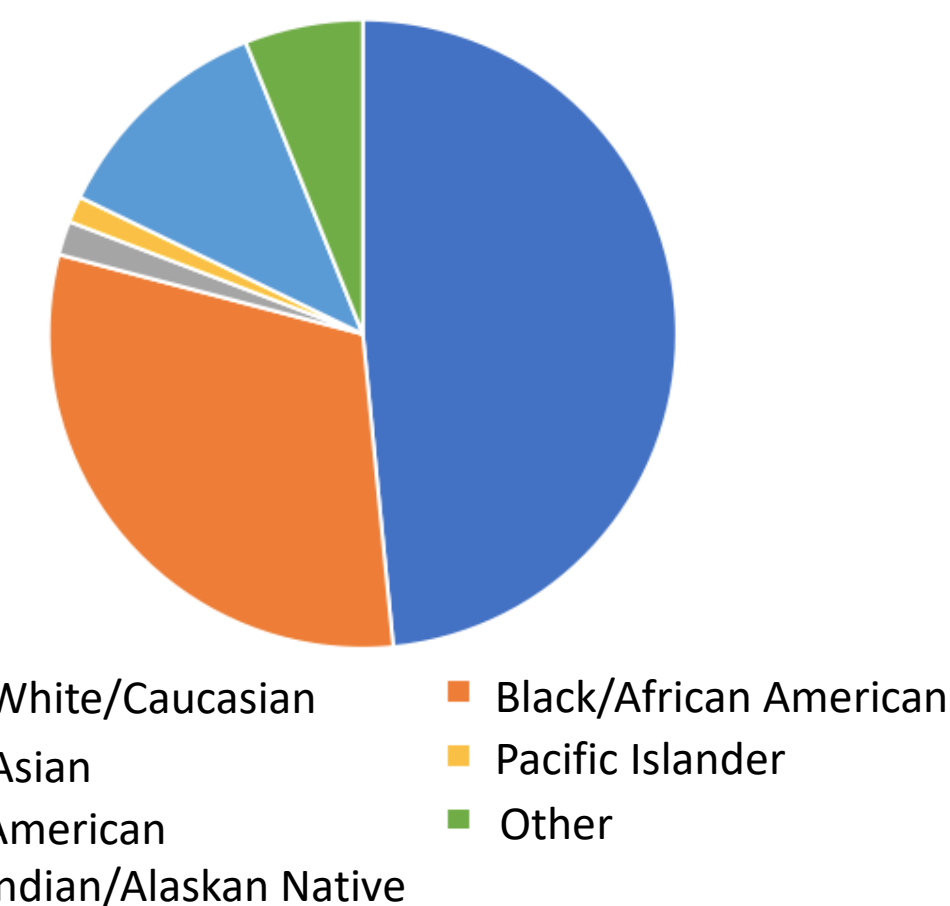


PARTICIPANTS

Police records were used to contact women about recent incidents of nonsexual IPV. All instances of IPV involved adult heterosexual couples.

- 208 women
- 33.42 (11) years old
- 58% Hispanic/Latina

Race and ethnicity



Relationship to offender at the time of the incident	Percent
Husband	12.7
Ex-husband	3.8
Boyfriend	45.8
Ex-boyfriend	20.8
Separated	1.7
Other	14

Current Employment Status	Percent
Employed full time	28
Employed part-time	19.9
Unemployed	40.2
Other	25.5

Highest level of Education	Percent
Did not complete high school	30.5
High school graduate	26.3
Some college	25
Associate's or 4-yr degree	14.4
Postgraduate	2.5
Other	1.3



METHOD

Measures

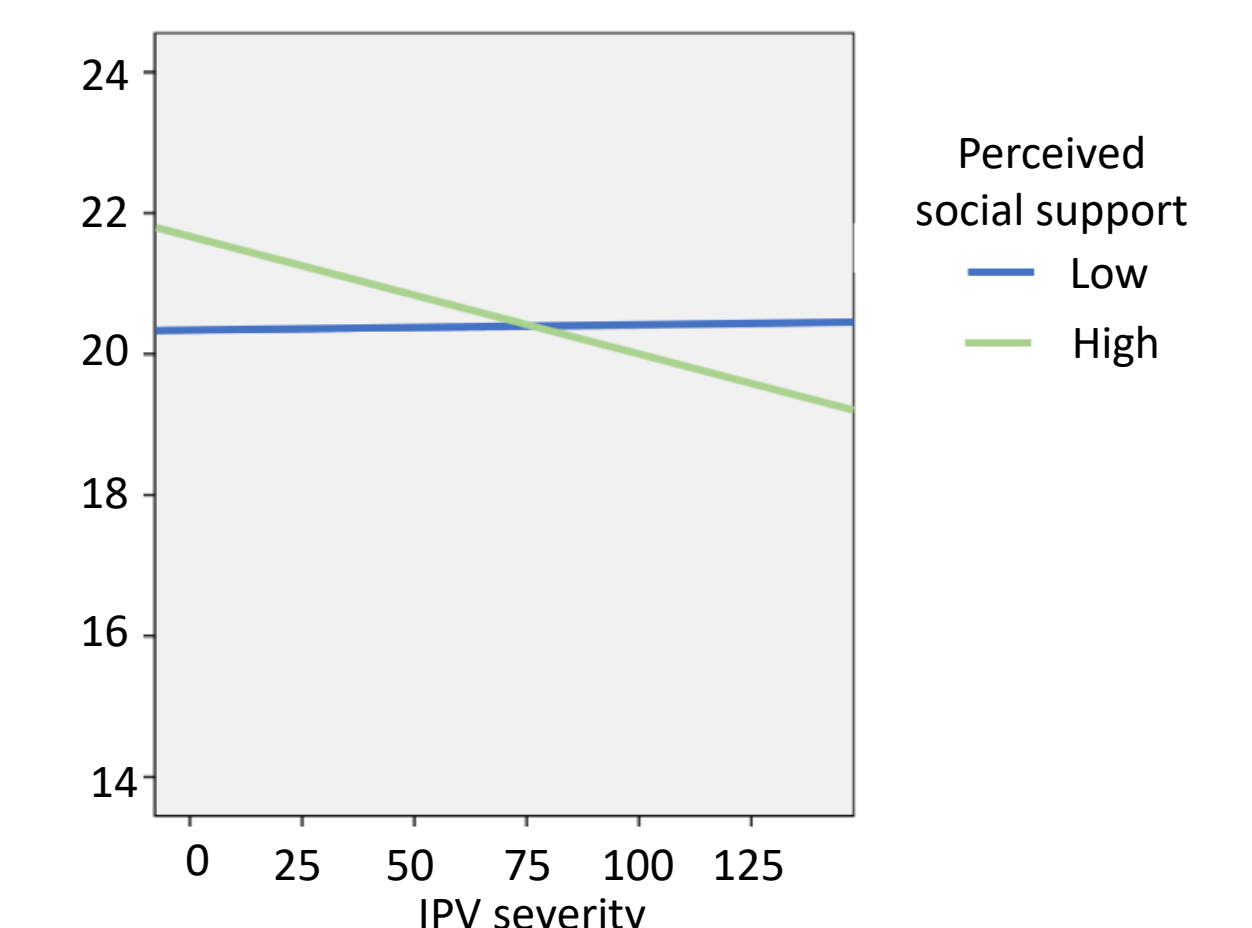
- IPV Severity: Conflict Tactics Scale⁷
 - Women reported on the severity of the IPV related to the police report.
- Perceived Social Support: Interpersonal Support Evaluation List^{8,9}
 - Women reported on their perceived social support.
- Help seeking behaviors:
 - The number of help seeking behaviors was determined through participants' reported engagement in a variety of behaviors after the reported incident.

After the incident on _____ did you do any of the following because of that incident?

	Yes / no / don't know /refused
Contact or go to the Police Department or jail	
Contact or go to the prosecutor	
Contact or go to a victim's advocate	
Contact or go to a women's shelter	
Contact or go to a counselor, therapist, or psychologist	
Contact or go to a medical doctor/clinic	
Contact a social service agency	
Contact or visit a lawyer	
Contact family or a friend	
Contact a minister or pastor	
Attend religious services	
Pray	
Other? (SPECIFY _____)	

RESULTS

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IPV severity	.03	.02	.36	1.51
Perceived social support	1.31	.53	.39	2.50*
IPV severity x Perceived social support	-.02	.01	-.53	-2.04*
*p < .05	R=.21, F(3, 204) = 3.25 p<.05 R ² =.05 (adjusted R ² =.03)			



DISCUSSION

A significant main effect of women's perceived social support indicated that greater social support was linked with more help seeking.

The relationship between women's reported IPV severity and help seeking behaviors was moderated by their perceived social support. When perceived social support was low, women engaged in more help seeking behaviors when IPV was more severe relative to less, consistent with existing research. However, when perceived social support was high, women engaged in more help seeking when IPV was less severe relative to more.

Implications and Future Directions

Results support findings from previous studies where more positive social reactions to disclosure after a recent sexual assault predicted reporting the incident to law enforcement.¹⁰ Although perceived social support differs from measures of social reactions to assault, both constructs may tap into prosocial resources that encourage women to seek out services after experiencing violence.

The main effect of perceived social support on women's help seeking behaviors varied depending on IPV severity. However, social support moderated this relationship such that women experiencing *more* severe IPV engaged in fewer help-seeking behaviors (relative to other women) when they had more social support. While having strong social networks may buffer some effects of IPV, understanding women's reticence to seek formal support – particularly through the criminal justice system – may be important to their safety.

That women who have low perceived social support are engaging in help seeking behaviors when IPV severity is high may be important for buffering the negative effects of IPV.

Limitations

Frequency of each help seeking behavior was not included in the analysis limiting these results to the total number of different help seeking behaviors. Future studies should include the type and frequency of help seeking behaviors and perceived quality of engagement to better understand women's responses to IPV.

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