

Economic Abuse, Compared to Emotional Abuse and Physical Abuse, Is Minimized More, Victims Are Blamed More, and Victims Are Provided with Less Legal Advice

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Abstract

Economic Abuse (EA) is an understudied phenomenon experienced by Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) victims. The purpose of this study was to examine how participants minimized IPV, blamed IPV victims, and offered legal advice to IPV victims based on IPV type (i.e., EA, Emotional Abuse (EmoA), Physical Abuse (PA)). One hundred and sixty participants were randomly assigned to read a scenario depicting one of the three types of IPV and answer questions about minimizing, blaming, and offering legal advice. We examined participants' Gender Role Ideology (GRI) and how GRI mediated the effect of IPV type and moderated the relationship between minimizing, blaming, and offering legal advice. We found that EA was minimized more than EmoA and PA, EA victims were blamed more than EmoA victims, and participants offered the least amount of legal advice to EA victims compared with EmoA and PA victims. We also found that men minimized IPV more than women did across all IPV types. GRI played no mediating role as hypothesized, but GRI did moderate the relationship between the EA scenario and minimizing—participants who read the EA scenario and had less traditional GRI minimized the IPV more. These results indicate that EA is not perceived as a severe issue nor a serious form of IPV even though the prevalence of EA is a serious concern. We discuss the need to raise public awareness of EA and the importance of extending more social resources to EA victims.

Keywords

Economic Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse, Intimate Partner

1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a multidimensional form of abuse in which a current or former intimate partner inflicts physical, sexual, or psychological abuse toward an individual (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2024). While both men and women fall victim to this global public health crisis, women are more likely to be victims of IPV, and approximately 27% of women are affected worldwide (Ali & McGarry, 2018; Clemens et al., 2023; Nesca et al., 2021; World Health Organization (WHO), 2024). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2024) reported a lifetime IPV prevalence of 41% for women and 26% for men in the United States. IPV includes verbal abuse, threats, rape, coercive control, and control of economic resources (Sorrentino et al., 2021) and often manifests itself through physical assault (e.g., slapping), sexual coercion (e.g., rape), stalking, and psychological abuse (e.g., blackmailing; Ali & McGarry, 2018; Bates & Weare, 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2024). Additionally, the impacts of IPV have serious physical, mental, and psychological repercussions. IPV is associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (e.g., intrusive thoughts, physiological arousal; Costa & Botelho, 2021), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation, and IPV exacerbates existing mental health conditions (Adams & Beeble, 2019; Miller & McCaw, 2019; Scrafford et al., 2019; White et al., 2024). Although researchers have found that men's victimization of IPV has drastically increased (Archer, 2000; Leemis et al., 2022; Lövestad & Krantz, 2012), we focus on women's victimization in the current study.

1.1. Types of IPV and the Importance of Examining Differences in IPV Types

Economic Abuse (EA) is defined as tactics hindering the economic self-sufficiency and self-efficacy of victims through financial exploitation and deliberate control over finances (Adams & Beeble, 2019; Byrt et al., 2023; Voth Schrag et al., 2018). EA is an understudied form of "invisible" IPV that represents an overarching barrier for victims of IPV to leave a violent relationship, with victims most often being women (Byrt et al., 2023). Despite being a topic of growing interest in the field, there is a lack of consistency in EA's definition and measurement, and the term "economic abuse" is also used interchangeably as "financial abuse", "economic violence", and "economic IPV" in the literature (Alkan et al., 2021; Ohlan, 2021; Postmus et al., 2020; Yau et al., 2021). EA is manifested in multiple ways: controlling access to money, denying access to financial information, ruining credit history, refusing to contribute income to expenses, sabotaging career and employment by controlling work and school hours, and belittling educational goals (Adams & Beeble, 2019; Voth Schrag & Edmond, 2017; Voth Schrag et al., 2020). In

the U.S., approximately 11% - 15% of the general population have reported experiencing EA, and this is a worldwide phenomenon experienced by women in other countries: 3% - 4.9% in Canada, 6.9% in the Philippines, 21% in the United Kingdom, and 44% - 45% in Palestine (see Kutin et al., 2017 for a detailed review). Because of the dependent nature of EA, lack of self-sufficiency and financial hardship are the primary limiting factors for escaping a relationship in which IPV occurs (Kutin et al., 2017; Voth Schrag et al., 2018; Warrener et al., 2013). The implication of EA is often overlooked due to the lack of awareness of EA's occurrence between partners in intimate relationships and the difficulties in identifying such occurrences for individuals outside of the relationship, leading to a relentless cycle of abuse and dependency among victims (Kutin et al., 2017; Kutin et al., 2022).

Emotional Abuse (EmoA) is defined as behaviors and comments meant to degrade a victim's sense of self-worth, and this includes name-calling, public embarrassment, threats, passive-aggressive acts, possessiveness, and excessively monitoring the whereabouts of a victim (Arriaga & Schkeryantz, 2015; Cascardi et al., 2020; Stylianou, 2018). According to researchers, almost 50% of all women IPV victims reported any EmoA (Leemis et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2017), 70% - 80% of youth in the U.S. are affected by EmoA (Começanha et al., 2017), and multiracial populations and being a female are significant predictors for psychological maltreatment (Vidourek, 2017). The adverse impacts of psychological abuse (i.e., EmoA) are extensive because victims can experience terror and flashbacks years after this abuse has ended, and these consequences can affect current relationships, health, and quality of life (Queen et al., 2009). Victims of EmoA experience worse psychological and physical health compared to women who are not abused (Queen, 2007). Similar to EA, EmoA is difficult to detect since outward manifestations are not obvious compared to PA (e.g., bruises, broken bones). Although EmoA is three times more common in intimate partner relationships than PA, PA is still perceived as more harmful than EmoA and is still the primary focus when discussing implications of IPV (Cascardi et al., 2020; Dutton et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 2023).

Physical Abuse (PA) is defined as intentional physical aggression toward a victim resulting in injury by hitting, kicking, punching, choking, burning, throwing objects, or using a weapon (Heyman et al., 2020; Lampe et al., 2003; Tsur et al., 2021). Two-thirds of women who have been physically abused by their partner have also been sexually assaulted by the same partner, and this indicates that PA is highly associated with sexual violence (Taylor & Gaskin-Laniyan, 2007; World Health Organization [WHO], 2024; Willis & Marcantonio, 2021). Approximately 29% of women have experienced PA or sexual abuse (Coker et al., 2021), and one in three women worldwide will be subjected to PA from their romantic partner (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). In the U.S., 20% of women 15 years or older are victims of PA (Chisholm et al., 2017), and 42% of women experience PA during their lifetime (Leemis et al., 2022). The impacts of PA are extended to both physical and mental health—it is associated with chronic diseases such as

heart disease, cancer, gastrointestinal disorders, chronic pain, eating disorders, and health-compromising behaviors such as substance abuse and smoking (Coker et al., 2021; Huston et al., 2019; Weissbecker & Clark, 2007). Long-term psychological consequences include depression, anxiety, somatization, and a higher risk of suicide (Al-Modallal et al., 2008).

1.2. Gender and Sex Assigned at Birth Differences in Attitudes

Masci and Sanderson (2017) found that men were more likely than women to find psychological abuse as acceptable in interpersonal relationships while women were more likely than men to view psychological abuse as *common* in interpersonal relationships. El Abani and Pourmehdi (2021) found that men with lower levels of education had a higher tendency to perceive IPV against women as merely a personal and family issue compared to women with similar levels of education. Previous researchers have also noted that sex assigned at birth has an impact on attitudes toward women victims of IPV (El Abani & Pourmehdi, 2021; Keller & Honea, 2016). Males were more likely to minimize the abuse and blame the victim of IPV compared to females in cases of IPV against women (El Abani & Pourmehdi, 2021; Keller & Honea, 2016; Yamawaki et al., 2018). In contrast, females showed less likelihood of holding victim-blaming attitudes toward the woman victim of IPV compared to males (Ivert et al., 2018). Researchers have also found that males who engaged in interpersonal violence themselves and condoned or justified violence were more likely to blame the victim compared to females (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2016). Moreover, recent studies have revealed that, regardless of the gender of the IPV victim, males were more likely to blame IPV victims compared to female participants (Hill et al., 2023).

Researchers have yet to explore individuals' tendencies to provide legal advice to women IPV victims and how this influences the relationship between IPV and attitudes toward victims. Civil protection orders, such as the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, have allowed women IPV victims to receive legal protection, access tangible benefits, and have provided legally enforceable penalties for abusers (Hefner et al., 2021; Richards et al., 2018). However, women IPV victims often face difficulties accessing affordable legal representation. In fact, 26% of women IPV victims have been found to experience challenges to afford lawyer fees (Gezinski & Gonzalez-Pons, 2021; Pomicino et al., 2019), and women IPV victims often encounter legal barriers with law enforcement that minimize cases of IPV (Childress & Hanusa, 2018). Researchers have reported that in a consultation setting for IPV, it is recommended to refer IPV victims to receive legal assistance (Gordon, 2016). While the recommendation from professionals for IPV victims to seek legal assistance has been established, it will be important to understand individuals' attitudes toward IPV victims and whether or not these individuals would recommend IPV victims to seek legal help. Additionally, since scarce research has been conducted regarding individuals' perceptions of IPV regarding their tendencies to provide legal advice to IPV victims, this will add to the litera-

ture regarding attitudes toward IPV.

1.3. Gender Role Ideology

Gender Role Ideology (GRI) can be categorized into two facets: traditional and non-traditional (i.e., egalitarian). Traditional GRI defines men as the primary breadwinners who maintain financial security for the family and women as the primary homemakers who fulfill housework and child-rearing responsibilities (Baxter et al., 2016; Kulik, 2020). Previous researchers have found a positive association between a husband's traditional GRI and physical assault against his wife with non-traditional gender attitudes (Cheung & Choi, 2016) and that traditional GRI predicts a higher likelihood of justifying those who are abusive (Erickson et al., 2017). Yamawaki et al. (2009; 2018) found that individuals with traditional GRI were more likely to minimize the seriousness of IPV, blame the IPV victim, and excuse the IPV perpetrator compared with those with non-traditional GRI.

Egalitarian GRI is defined as unbiased attitudes toward breaking traditional gender roles and viewing both genders as equal (i.e., using binary gender identities; Sherwood, 2007). Previous researchers have found that men tend to have more traditional gender role beliefs than women, and this indicates that women may hold more egalitarian gender role beliefs compared to men (Araujo et al., 2017; Delgado-Herrera et al., 2024; Fitzpatrick et al., 2004; Müller & Renes, 2021; Sherwood, 2007). Higher egalitarian GRI is associated with lower support of IPV perpetration and higher advocacy for IPV victims. Martínez and Khalil (2013) found that 76% of participants with an egalitarian GRI did not support IPV against women. Anderson (2005) found that men with an egalitarian GRI were less likely to engage in IPV compared to men with a traditional GRI, and individuals with an egalitarian GRI were more likely to reject rape myths, more likely to view an IPV scenario as serious, and less likely to blame the victim (Berkel et al., 2004; Tam & Tang, 2005).

1.4. Theoretical Framework

While the study of perceptions and attitudes toward IPV victims and perpetrators demonstrates its complex and multifaceted nature, the current study focuses on investigating individuals' perceptions of different types of IPV through the framework of feminist theory (Burelomova et al., 2018). Scholars who support the feminist theory posit that the root cause of IPV stems from the gender inequality that continues to be pervasive in the patriarchal sociocultural context, and that the beliefs that support male dominance and female subordination explain the reality that women are more likely to be victims of IPV (Burelomova et al., 2018). Gender as a social construct leads to privilege for men and oppression for women, and gender differences in attitudes toward IPV severity have been previously established, with men perceiving IPV as less serious and being less willing to intervene in cases of IPV than women (Badenes-Sastre et al., 2024; Gracia et al., 2020). This theoretical framework guided the construction of the current study as we seek to

further investigate how the feminist theory applies within the context of outsiders' perceptions toward the victim in different types of IPV.

1.5. Purpose of Study

Within this study, we examined three types of IPV: EA, EmoA, and PA. Researchers have noted that both EA and EmoA are difficult to identify yet are associated with an increase in distress symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression; Crump, 2020; Richardson et al., 2020), and different neuropsychological consequences for women were found between EmoA and PA victims (Daugherty et al., 2019). Unsurprisingly, previous researchers have noted that individuals tend to attribute blame for IPV based on its severity. As a result, blame may be attributed to certain types of IPV differently based on how severely individuals perceive the IPV to be, and this could differ based on participant gender and/or the type of IPV (i.e., EA, EmoA, PA). Therefore, EA, EmoA, and PA should be studied as distinct forms of IPV since each type of abuse is perceived differently and has a different impact on victims. Although little is known about EA, Postmus et al. (2020) argued that EA is a form of IPV that is a separate category from EmoA and is frequently overlooked while impacting the lives of women IPV victims. Therefore, studying EA among IPV survivors is crucial. Due to the high prevalence rates and great consequences of IPV toward victims, we examined how participants viewed three forms of IPV and participants' tendencies to minimize the IPV, blame the victim, and provide legal advice to the victim. We also examined the impact of participant gender on these tendencies and the predictive role that GRI would have on such tendencies.

We recruited college students for this study since it is important to examine the attitudes that college students have toward IPV perpetrators and victims. For example, Voth Schrag and Edmond (2018) found that within the last year for their sample of college students, approximately 27% experienced IPV. Due to the prevalence of IPV among college students, it is important to examine these individuals' attitudes toward different types of IPV and to examine if differences in their attitudes exist based on the type of IPV being perpetrated.

1.6. Hypotheses in the Current Study

Hypothesis 1: It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect of type of IPV on minimizing the IPV, blaming the victim, and offering legal advice to the victim due to outward manifestations that are not obvious for EA and EmoA in comparison to PA. We hypothesized that the EA and EmoA scenarios would be minimized more, and the victim of the EA and EmoA scenario would be blamed more and receive less advice in comparison to the PA scenario.

Hypothesis 2: It was hypothesized that there would be a main effect of participant gender on minimizing the IPV, blaming the victim, and offering legal advice to the victim due to the previous findings of men's tendency to minimize IPV and blame victims. We hypothesized that men would minimize the IPV more, blame

the victim more, and provide less legal advice to the victim than women would.

Hypothesis 3: It was hypothesized that GRI would predict minimizing the IPV, blaming the victim, and providing legal advice to the victim due to GRI's impact of advocacy for IPV victims.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

One hundred and sixty students (116 women, 44 men) from undergraduate courses participated in this study in exchange for three SONA credits. Participants' ages ranged from 18 - 44 ($M = 20.61$, $SD = 3.20$), and participants identified their race as follows: White ($n = 141$, 88.13%), Asian ($n = 5$, 3.13%), Black or African American ($n = 1$, 0.63%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ($n = 1$, 0.63%), Other ($n = 4$, 2.50%), and more than once race selected ($n = 8$, 5.00%). Regarding ethnicity, 13 participants (8.13%) identified as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish whereas 147 participants (91.88%) did not identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Scenarios

We developed three hypothetical scenarios for the purpose of this study. All three scenarios were constructed similarly, and the scenarios differed based on the type of IPV described (i.e., EA, EmoA, PA). The PA scenario was created by modifying the scenarios utilized in previous published works on domestic violence (Riley & Yamawaki, 2018; Yamawaki et al., 2009; Yamawaki et al., 2012), and the EA and EmoA scenarios were created by replacing the content depicting PA to each type of IPV in question. We utilized scenarios in this research study due to the prevalence of scenario usage for IPV research (e.g., Basow & Thompson, 2012; Bates et al., 2019; Ermer et al., 2021; Roeg et al., 2022; Yechezkel & Ayalon, 2013) and because it is an ethical way to examine attitudes toward IPV victims and IPV itself without depicting real-world IPV victims. The following scenario represents EA. The italicized portions in brackets represent the descriptions of EmoA, and the underlined portions in brackets represent the descriptions of PA:

Sarah is a mother in her mid-thirties with two young children. Her husband, Michael, is the primary wage-earner of the household and works 9-5. Sarah and Michael decided that she would stop working to be a stay-at-home mom and focus on raising their children. Michael makes every investment decision for the family without discussing finances with Sarah. [Michael occasionally *[yells at]* [pushes] Sarah and *[tells her that she is stupid and worthless]* [holds her down] during heated arguments.] Michael has complete access to Sarah's credit cards and bank accounts and takes out loans in her name, while Sarah does not have access to any financial resources. [He *[verbally threatens to hurt her]* [hits her] if she raises her voice or contradicts him.] Sarah is on edge because her lack of control with finances *[insults and threats to her safety]* [the arguments and hitting] have become more consistent and intense, to the point where Sarah tries not to have friends or

family come over too often. She cannot buy household items, food, and children's items (clothes, etc.) without asking Michael for money. [She doesn't want her loved ones to see [*Michael yell at her and insult her*]/[*her scars and bruises*]]. Most of their arguments happen on nights when Michael is overworked or stressed from working late. Michael gets particularly upset when Sarah tries to address his full control over financial resources [*outbursts*]/[*aggression*] after stressful workdays.

2.2.2. Measurements

The Perceived Seriousness of Violence Measure (Yamawaki et al., 2009) measured the degree to which participants perceived the seriousness of the IPV. This measure consisted of five items, and all items were reverse-scored. Items included "These incidents should be considered abusive", and "These incidents are cases of intimate partner abuse.". Participants responded on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and higher scores indicated more minimization of the IPV while lower scores indicated less minimization of the IPV. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .84.

The Victim-Blame Attribution Measure (Yamawaki et al., 2009) measured the degree to which participants blamed the victim of IPV. This measure consisted of five items, and no items were reverse-scored. Items included "Sarah has some faults in these arguments" and "Sarah should be blamed for these arguments". Participants responded on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and higher scores indicated more blame toward the IPV victim while lower scores indicated less blame toward the IPV victim. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .80.

The Advice for Legal Assistance Scale (ALA) was created for the purpose of the current study and measured the degree to which participants offered advice to the victim to seek legal assistance due to the IPV. This measure consisted of six items, and all six items were reverse-scored. Items included "Sarah should call the police" and "Michael should be arrested". Participants responded on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and higher scores indicated less legal advice given to the IPV victim while lower scores indicated more legal advice given to the IPV victim. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .94, demonstrating excellent internal consistency.

The Gender Role Ideology Measure was developed by Fuwa (2014) to measure participants' GRI. This measure consisted of five items, and no items were reverse-scored. Items included "A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children", and "All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job". Participants responded on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and higher scores indicated a more traditional GRI while lower scores indicated a more egalitarian GRI. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .78.

2.2.3. Attention Check Questions

Participants responded to two attention check questions in this survey. These two items were placed within the survey to ensure participants were paying attention to the survey and its questions. These two questions were as follows: "For quality

control purposes, please select ‘Strongly disagree’ for this question” and “For quality control purposes, please select ‘Agree’ for this question”.

2.2.4. Demographics Questions

Participants responded to demographics questions related to the following: gender, LGBTQ + identity, age, race, ethnicity, highest level of education completed, marital status, and employment status.

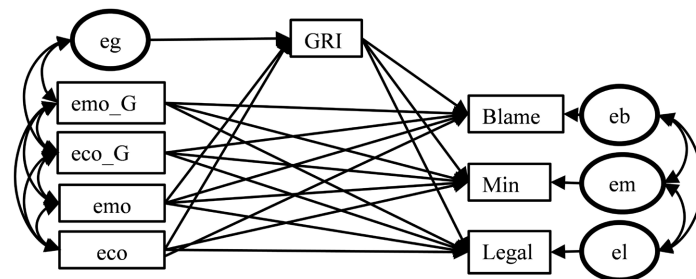
2.3. Procedure

Participants were recruited via the SONA system at a private university in Utah, and the survey was hosted by Qualtrics (<http://www.qualtrics.com/>). Participants were told that the purpose of this study was to determine individuals’ perceptions toward a married couple that was experiencing relationship problems. First, participants were given a consent form and three consent form questions to ensure they volunteered to participate in our study. Second, participants were randomly assigned to read one of the three scenarios (EA [$n = 55$], EmoA [$n = 51$], and PA [$n = 54$]). Third, participants received the three dependent variable measurements in a randomized order to control for order effects. Fourth, participants completed the Gender Role Ideology Measure (Fuwa, 2014). Fifth, participants responded to demographic questions. As the participants were informed at the commencement of the study that they would read hypothetical scenarios, no deception was involved in the procedure. Thus, no debriefing process was deemed necessary following the completion of the study. All participants received three SONA credits for their participation. Within the survey itself, there were two attention check questions. All participants correctly answered both attention check questions. This study was approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (anonymized). All participants were treated in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association.

2.4. Data Analytic Strategy

Descriptive analyses were conducted to describe the demographic characteristics of this sample. Before testing the first two hypotheses, which were to investigate differing patterns of participants’ minimizing, blaming, and offering legal advice among three types of IPV and how participant gender impacted these attitudes, it is important that the assumptions of MANOVA were met. We ran Box’s M to examine the distribution of covariance matrices, and Levene’s test to investigate the homogeneity of variances. The results showed that the assumptions were not met [Box’s M = 79.03, $p < .001$; Levene’s test for minimization $F(5/154) = 3.82$, $p < .001$, blaming $F(5/154) = 4.35$, $p < .001$, and legal advice $F(5/154) = 1.38$, $p = .23$, respectively]. This is a limitation of this study. However, we proceeded with the planned analysis and cautiously interpreted the results. A MANOVA was conducted using SPSS (version 26.0; SPSS Inc.). Therefore, we utilized a semi-experimental analytic design. Additionally, the data analysis was organized to 1) explore the possible role of GRI in mediating the effect of IPV type on minimizing the

IPV, blaming the victim, and offering legal advice to the victim and 2) investigate the possibility of a moderating or interactive relationship between GRI and IPV in predicting participants' levels of minimizing the IPV, blaming the victim, and offering legal advice to the victim. In the mediation analyses, we examined direct, indirect, and total effects to evaluate if full or partial mediation was present. Since the possible interactive relationship between GRI and IPV in predicting the study's Dependent Variables (DVs) has not been previously studied, we incorporated this interactive relationship in the analyses. Therefore, a moderated mediation analysis with the three DVs was performed using AMOS v26 (see **Figure 1**). After testing a moderation effect, we conducted a test of the GRI slope differences among the three IPV types.



Note. In this diagram, emo and eco are the two dummy variables for emotional and economic abuse when encoding IPV type (with physical abuse as the reference category), and emo_G and eco_G are the products of GRI with the two dummy variables. Note that the disturbance term for GRI (eg) is correlated with the two product terms.

Figure 1. Moderated mediation model.

3. Results

3.1. The Effects of Scenario and Gender on Minimizing, Blaming, and Offering Advice for Legal Assistance

To investigate hypotheses one and two, a 3 (scenario: EA, EmoA, PA) \times 2 (gender: man, woman) MANOVA was performed on the three DVs (i.e., minimizing, blaming, offering legal advice; see **Table 1** and **Table 2** for means and standard deviations). As MANOVA assumptions were not met, we used the most robust and conservative multivariate statistic, Pillai's Trace. There were main effects for type of scenario (Pillai's Trace = .50, $F[6, 304] = 19.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .276$) and participant gender (Pillai's Trace = .92, $F[3, 152] = 5.43$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .097$) on the DVs. No interactions were found ($F[6, 304] = .933$, $p = .472$, $\eta_p^2 = .018$). Regarding the main effect of the scenario, the follow-up univariate results were significant for minimizing ($F[2, 154] = 20.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .214$), blaming ($F[2, 154] = 4.01$, $p = .020$, $\eta_p^2 = .050$), and offering legal advice ($F[2, 154] = 57.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .428$). Additionally, the follow-up univariate tests for gender indicated that men minimized the IPV more than women did ($F[1, 154] = 16.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .096$), but there were no significant differences between men and women on blaming ($F[1, 154] = 2.44$, $p = n.s.$, $\eta_p^2 = .016$) or offering legal advice ($F[1, 154] = 1.65$, $p = n.s.$, $\eta_p^2 = .011$).

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for DVs as a function of scenario and gender.

	Economic IPV		Emotional IPV		Physical IPV	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Minimization	13.62 (3.95)	9.62 (4.27)	8.50 (2.51)	7.62 (3.18)	8.37 (3.66)	6.03 (1.36)
Blame	14.92 (6.28)	12.33 (5.26)	10.67 (5.53)	10.72 (4.02)	12.11 (5.81)	10.57 (3.58)
Legal Advice	30.08 (8.79)	29.19 (7.50)	23.75 (6.93)	22.33 (7.56)	15.00 (5.99)	12.43 (5.51)

Note. DVs = Dependent Variables; Minimization = Perceived Seriousness of Violence Measure; Blame = Victim-Blame Attribution Measure; Legal Advice = Advice for Legal Assistance Scale.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for dependent measures by gender.

	Men	Women
Minimization***	12.55 (5.98)	11.26 (4.43)
Blaming	9.95 (4.12)	7.86 (3.55)
Legal Advice	21.84 (9.54)	21.83 (9.73)

Note. Minimization = Perceived Seriousness of Violence Measure; Blaming = Victim-Blame Attribution Measure; Legal Advice = Advice for Legal Assistance Scale. *** = $p < 0.001$.

Regarding minimizing, there were significant differences between the EA and EmoA scenarios ($p < .001$) and the EA and PA scenarios ($p < .001$). As such, participants minimized the EA scenario more compared to EmoA and PA scenarios. The difference between the EmoA and PA scenarios was not significant ($p = n.s.$). As for blaming, there was a significant difference between the EA and EmoA scenarios ($p = .049$). This indicates that participants blamed the victim more in the EA scenario compared to the EmoA scenario. There were no significant differences between the EA and PA scenarios and the EmoA and PA scenarios (all p 's = $n.s.$). Regarding offering legal advice, there were significant differences among all three types of IPV. Participants were most inclined to offer legal advice for the victim in the PA scenario, then the EmoA scenario, and then the EA scenario (all p 's < .001).

3.2. Moderated Mediation Analysis

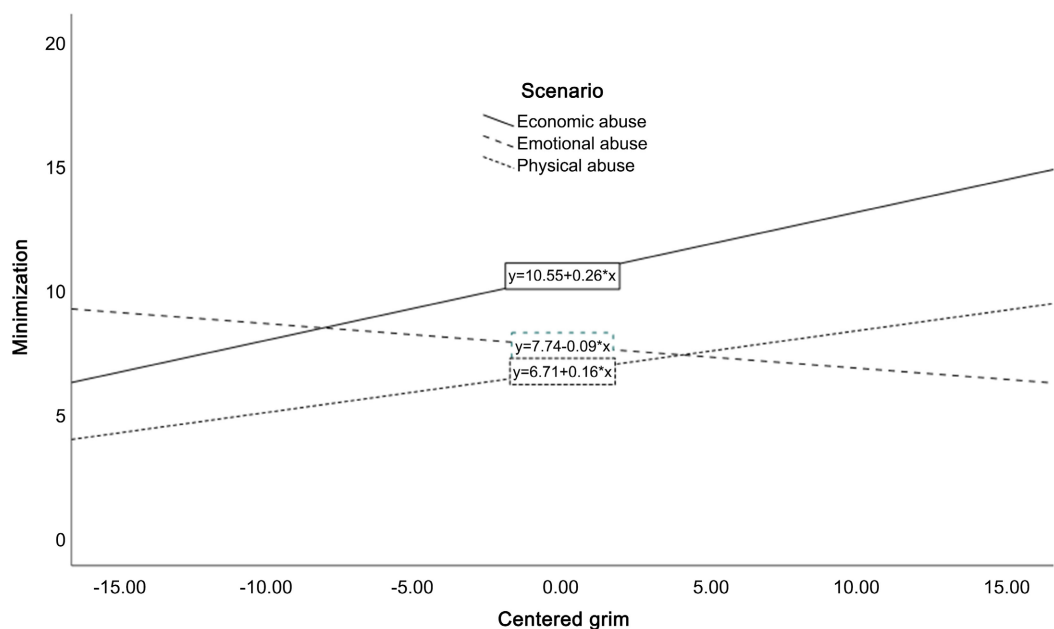
A moderated mediation analysis was tested (see **Figure 1**) to explore the mediating and moderating role of GRI with respect to the multi-categorical independent variable (i.e., EA, EmoA, PA) and the three main DVs (i.e., minimizing the IPV, blaming the victim, offering legal advice to the victim; see **Table 3**). PA was used as the reference group for the dummy coding of IPV. The results revealed that GRI had no significant mediating role in the effects of IPV on any of the three DVs. Specifically, none of the indirect effects of the difference between PA and EA on minimizing, blaming, and offering legal advice were statistically significant ($b = -.017, -.022, -.009$, all p 's = $n.s.$, respectively), nor were any of the indirect effects of the difference between PA and EmoA on minimizing, blaming, or offering legal advice ($b = -.038, -.048, -.020$, all p 's = $n.s.$).

Table 3. Number of participants randomly assigned to each scenario by gender.

Scenario	PA		EA		EmoA	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
N	16	39	13	42	12	42

Note. PA = Physical Abuse Scenario; EA = Economic Abuse Scenario; EmoA = Emotional Abuse Scenario.

There were no significant effects of the interaction of GRI with the difference between EA and PA on minimizing ($b = .093$, $SE = .112$, $CR = .830$, $p = .406$), blaming ($b = .078$, $SE = .115$, $CR = .500$, $p = .617$), or offering legal advice ($b = .044$, $SE = .232$, $CR = .189$, $p = .850$). However, moderation was found to have a significant effect on the interaction of GRI with the difference between EA and PA on minimizing ($b = -.254$, $SE = .123$, $CR = -2.06$, $p = .039$). The corresponding effects for blaming and offering legal advice were not statistically significant ($b = -.143$, $SE = .170$, $CR = -.838$, $p = .402$; $b = .044$, $SE = .232$, $CR = .189$, $p = .850$). To further explore and illustrate the interaction between GRI and IPV for minimizing, a generalized linear model analysis was conducted to estimate and compare the effects of GRI on minimizing for the different types of IPV (see **Figure 2**). The effect of GRI on minimizing was statistically significant for EA ($b = .257$, $SE = .077$, $t = 3.342$, $p < .001$) but not for EmoA or PA ($b = -.089$, $SE = .093$, $t = -.965$, $p = .336$ and $b = .164$, $SE = .084$, $t = 1.952$, $p = .053$). The differences between the effects for EA and EmoA and EmoA and PA were statistically significant ($F[1, 154] = 8.29$, $p = .005$ and $F[1, 154] = 4.11$, $p = .044$), but the difference between the effects for EA and PA was not statistically significant ($F[1, 154] = .668$, $p = .415$).



Note. The results of a generalized linear model analysis illustrating the interaction between GRI and the different types of IPV (i.e., economic abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse) for minimizing.

Figure 2. Slopes of gender role ideology with minimization by scenarios.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how participants minimized IPV, blamed the victim, and offered legal advice to the victim based on the scenario condition. We examined the effects of scenario condition and participant gender and a mediated moderated model of GRI on minimizing the IPV, blaming the victim, and offering legal advice to the victim. To our knowledge, we are the first researchers to compare participants' attitudes toward EA, EmoA, and PA regarding minimization, blame, and legal advice.

4.1. Scenario Condition

EA was minimized significantly more compared to both EmoA and PA, but there were no significant differences in minimizing between EmoA and PA. This finding offers a new perspective to the IPV literature because no previous researchers have directly compared the perceptions of EA with EmoA and PA. A possible explanation for the minimization of EA is the fact that EA, similar to EmoA, does not involve blatant physical injuries and is minimized in a similar pattern (Wilson & Smirles, 2022). The lack of significance between minimization patterns of EmoA and PA was inconsistent with previous research that revealed participants' tendency to minimize psychological abuse (synonymous with EmoA) more than PA (Wilson & Smirles, 2022).

Participants who read the EA scenario blamed the victim more than participants who read the EmoA scenario. A potential explanation for this finding could be the lack of understanding of EA in general. For example, since EA is such an understudied topic, participants may not understand the magnitude of the financial control that is involved in EA perpetration and the long-term implications of EA on the victims. Participants may think that EA is not a form of IPV and that it can be easily avoided by leaving the perpetrator, getting a job, or asking family for financial support. As such, the blame is not placed on the perpetrator but on the victim for not leaving the situation or not being self-reliant. However, due to the nature of EA (e.g., Adams & Beeble, 2019; Voth Schrag et al., 2018), these seemingly simple options are hindered by the perpetrator due to the perpetrators' financial exploitation of the victim and their full control over finances. According to the control-balance theory, the greater victims perceive the magnitude of their control deficiency, the less likely they are to seek ways to reverse their circumstances (Castro et al., 2020).

Participants offered the most legal advice to the PA victim, followed by the EmoA victim, and then the EA victim. This shows that although legal assistance is still an encouraged solution for IPV, EA is not perceived as an IPV that would require legal intervention for most people, or it remains unclear how legal assistance can be utilized to mitigate the damages of EA. This finding is partially consistent with previous researchers who found that seeking legal assistance remained the top choice for victims of IPV regardless of their actual experience with the legal system (Balenovich et al., 2008; O'Dell, 2008). The EA victim received the

least amount of legal advice compared to EmoA and PA victims, and this raises concerns since EA is not accurately represented in the legal definition of IPV (synonymous with “domestic violence” under federal law) in the U.S.

4.2. Gender

Consistent with previous research findings (e.g., Yamawaki et al., 2018), men minimized the seriousness of the IPV more than women did. This may be due to the scenarios depicting a woman as the victim and a man as the perpetrator. In general, however, men tend to minimize IPV (El Abani & Pourmehdi, 2021; Keller & Honea, 2016; Yamawaki et al., 2018), and Scott-Storey et al. (2022) noted that even when men are IPV victims themselves, gender socialization may be responsible for men minimizing their own experiences of IPV. As such, societal norms are a crucial factor as to why men tend to minimize IPV in general.

In this study, there was no significant effect of gender on victim blaming. This indicates that men and women showed similar blaming patterns across all three IPV types. This is inconsistent with previous researchers' findings which revealed that female participants blamed the IPV victim less than male participants and that male participants blamed the female victim of stalking more than female participants (Sylaska & Walters, 2014; Yamawaki et al., 2020). This lack of gender differences could potentially be explained by the lack of diversity in the current sample as it consisted of predominantly White college students who could have less relatability with the IPV victim. It may also be due to the fact that there were more women than men in our sample.

There was also no significant effect of gender on offering legal advice. This finding is inconsistent with a previous finding from Sylaska and Walters (2014) who reported that female college students tended to encourage the victim to seek professional help more than male participants. From the perspective of the victim, it was also found that participants were more likely to call the police for a female victim of IPV compared to a male victim (Cormier & Woodworth, 2008; Harris & Cook, 1994; Rayburn et al., 2007, as cited in Sylaska & Walters, 2014). Moreover, because we did not have an equal number of men and women in our sample, null findings for offering legal advice could be a result of this imbalance. Gender is nonetheless still an important factor to examine due to inconsistent results based on gender differences in previous findings and in the current study regarding minimization. Therefore, future researchers should put a stronger emphasis on examining these differences in their research studies.

4.3. Interaction Effects

No interaction effects were found in the present study involving the scenario conditions and gender. These null findings may be explained by the lack of diversity in the current sample and a lack of significant effects in some of the DVs examined. As there were no hypotheses specifically targeted toward interaction effects, the current findings were exploratory. Further exploration is needed to examine

the potential interaction effects of scenarios and gender.

4.4. Gender Role Ideology

Based on the results from the moderated mediation model, there was a significant interaction effect between GRI and differences between EmoA and PA for minimization (i.e., a moderation effect). Within the context of EA and PA, participants with a more traditional GRI minimized the IPV more. The finding that traditional gender roles are associated with a higher tendency to minimize the severity of violence against women is consistent with the literature (Badenes-Sastre et al., 2024; Stanziani et al., 2019). Within the context of EmoA, however, people with a less traditional GRI minimized the IPV more. This inconsistent effect with the other two types of IPV may be due to the fact that our GRI measurement is limited to GRI of women in work settings only, and this makes this measurement incomplete in capturing other aspects of GRI. An additional reason could be attributed to the demographics of our sample as we recruited individuals from a private university that predominantly consists of Christian students. Therefore, it is possible that GRI within this sample is not generalizable to the United States due to the religious beliefs of the participants in this sample. As such, this analysis is exploratory, and researchers should conduct further studies to examine this effect.

4.5. Implications

The findings from this research study emphasize the importance of continuing to examine EA and to recognize EA as a legitimate form of IPV. From this study, it is apparent that EA is a largely understudied and minimized form of IPV. EA was minimized by participants in this study, and individuals recommended the least amount of legal help-seeking behaviors for EA victims compared to EmoA and PA victims. This indicates that the public's perception of EA could be significantly different from the perceptions of EA victims. Additionally, it is likely that certain victims of EA are unaware that they are experiencing EA and they internally normalize the behaviors of the perpetrator due to the lack of public knowledge about EA. This lack of understanding of EA is problematic because it could make EA perpetrators more likely to further exploit the rights of the victims which ultimately lead to a significant lack of support for the victims.

One solution to enhance public understanding of EA is to conduct more EA-specific research studies. Previous researchers have found that IPV victims tend to experience multiple types of abuse concurrently (Anderson, 2010; Basile & Hall, 2011; Stylianou et al., 2013). Therefore, studying the interrelationship and the degree of overlap of EA and other types of IPV is crucial. Additionally, it is beneficial to study the direction of the relationship between EA and other forms of IPV because EA could be a form of abuse that signifies the beginning of other forms of IPV (e.g., EA occurs first and is followed by EmoA). Another recommendation to raise more awareness is to create EA-related measures that capture variations in EA. Although the Scale of Economic Abuse (SEA) has been revised twice (Adams

et al., 2020; Postmus et al., 2016), many aspects of EA are still understudied including the duration of abuse, to what degree financial resources are limited, and the magnitude of damage on the victim's future ability to stay financially independent. The creation of more specific EA measurements would be helpful for EA victims, and these measurements could potentially help EA victims identify tactics of the perpetrator. The prevalence of EA should also be emphasized in the field of public health to raise awareness because having accurate prevalence and incidence data of victims involved would help involve the public in protecting EA victims such as by promoting IPV shelter usage and legal seeking behaviors for EA victims. Additionally, physical and mental health repercussions that the victims undergo as a result of EA should be considered as a public health concern.

Although more comprehensive data are still needed to establish national and international prevalence rates, the current prevalence rate of EA is alarming. Postmus et al. (2012) found that of the women already experiencing some form of IPV, 94% of them also experience EA. Mental healthcare workers should realize the severity of EA and guide victims to available resources when proclivities of EA are present in intimate relationships. For example, couples counseling professionals could have victims complete an EA measurement to identify potential EA in intimate partner relationships and separate the couple in counseling if EA is suspected.

The lack of representation of EA and EmoA in the legal definition of IPV is also a concerning issue. EA is not included as a form of IPV by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024), and EA and EmoA are not mentioned in the legal definition of IPV under federal law even after the most recent reauthorization act of 2022 on the Violence Against Women Act (Congress.gov, 2022). This indicates that the current legal system is not comprehensive in its understanding of IPV. An Australian study investigating the link between different types of abuse and the tendency to seek legal assistance echoed the existing norms in the U.S. in that police are unwilling to arrest IPV perpetrators if physical injuries are not found (Iovanni & Miller, 2001). One of the crucial first steps to address this urgent issue is through continuous advocacy to include EA and EmoA as a part of the legal definition of IPV. Moreover, researchers should form strong partnerships with nonprofit organizations already meaningfully engaged in supporting IPV victims (e.g., FreeForm, National Network to End Domestic Violence, Economic Justice Initiative) to seek their thought partnership for future directions in IPV research and collaborate to raise more community awareness about EA and EmoA.

Additionally, the findings from this research study strengthen the position of resource theory. As noted by Postmus et al. (2022: p. 4), "resource theory is used to explain violence from a relational or meso level as part of the ecological framework." Moreover, as noted by Alsawalqa (2020), an individual who has more power (e.g., more control over resources) can apply more force compared to an individual who has less power. In EA situations, the individual who has more power is

the individual who controls the economic resources within an intimate partnership, and this leaves the individual without any control over economic resources to have a dependency on the economic abuser. According to [Alsawalqa \(2020\)](#), this dependency can deter women who are victims of EA from leaving their perpetrator. Additionally, due to patriarchal beliefs within society, when EA is perpetrated by a man toward his wife—the victim of EA—EA may be seen as less of an issue compared to other forms of IPV, namely EmoA and PA, due to the societal acceptance individuals have of men having control over economic resources in general.

4.6. Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the study is that the assumptions of MANOVA were not met. Although we used the most robust and conservative multivariate statistic, Pillai's Trace, caution in the interpretation of the results is warranted. Another limitation is that our sample was not a representative sample of the U.S. because the 160 college students sampled in the study were predominantly White, women, and attended a Christian University. Future researchers need to ensure recruitment of a larger and more generalizable sample by increasing the sample size, implementing sampling quotas by gender, and recruiting participants from a more diverse population. Additionally, replicating the results of this study in cross-cultural populations and in community populations would effectively enhance the external validity of the results and enable examinations of the differences in perceptions based on participants' educational status and other potential contributing factors (e.g., age, race, socio-economic status) based on different types of IPV.

Limitations of the study materials should also be addressed in future studies. For example, the gender of the victim and the perpetrator should be manipulated (e.g., a woman perpetrator, a man victim) to examine attitudes toward different genders that experience EA. Since nearly 1 in 3 men experienced IPV in their lifetime ([Smith et al., 2017](#)), individual's perception toward men victims of IPV should also be examined in future studies. This would allow researchers to further examine how resource theory could explain EA. Researchers should also examine non-heterosexual relationships to understand how individuals minimize the IPV, blame the victim, and offer legal advice to non-heterosexual victims experiencing EA. Additionally, the GRI measurement may not have been comprehensive in capturing participants' gender role ideologies since it only consisted of five items and all items were related to gender roles and working. Therefore, this measurement did not cover gender roles in the family, society, or intimate relationships, and these are important realms when examining gender roles. As such, utilizing a more comprehensive GRI measurement is warranted to better understand GRI as a predictor. Furthermore, since the hypothetical scenarios and the ALA scale were newly created for this study and had not been piloted, cautious interpretation of the results is recommended. The lack of formal validation processes of the scenarios and the ALA scale is a limitation that needs to be addressed in future studies.

These hypothetical scenarios should be utilized in future research studies to corroborate the findings in the current study. While attention check questions were embedded in the study survey to ensure the participants were properly answering the questions, no additional manipulation checks were implemented to ensure the vignettes clearly signaled PA, EmoA, and EA. Future work should include manipulation checks to strengthen the results further.

Although the feminist theory is a framework frequently referred to in studying perceptions of IPV and thus was used in the present study, the nature of IPV is complex, and interpretations of the results beyond gender differences and pervasive gender norms were not explored in the present study. For example, perceived distribution of resources of the individuals in the intimate relationship could also contribute to the different patterns of blame, minimization, and provision of legal advice for the three types of IPV. Future researchers should examine beliefs and attitudes toward different types of IPV through a more comprehensive lens, incorporating economic and sociological perspectives.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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