An exploration into the experiences of Cypriot male victims of domestic abuse; An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Eva Mikaela Christofi

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University of the West of England, Bristol for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

School of Psychology,

Faculty of Health and Social Sciences,

University of the West of England, Bristol

May 2018

Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I would like to thank my parents, sister, grandparents and my husband for being next to me every step of the way during this doctorate and for their support, patience and encouragement throughout this journey. I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Toni Dicaccavo and Dr. Nikki Hayfield, for their valuable guidance, support and insight throughout this research project. They inspired me greatly to work on this project and without them this project would not have been possible.  And finally, I am very grateful to the participants of this study for being so open and for sharing their experiences.

## Abstract

Domestic abuse (DA) perpetrated by female partners against male partners has been a subject of dispute amongst scholars, with disagreements regarding both the existence of male victimisation and the nature as well as the severity of such abuse. The current qualitative study explored the experiences of six Cypriot male victims who reported that they experienced abuse at the hands of their female partners. The research employed semi-structured interviews that facilitated the exploration of the participants' experiences of different types of abuse, the impacts of the abuse, as well as their experiences of seeking and receiving support. Given the importance of cultural understandings on issues such as gender roles, DA and victimisation, the study also considered the men's cultural background and thus, also explored their experiences of being male victims of a particular culture. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) guided the analysis and illustrated that the participants' experiences of abuse had a damaging impact on their sense of masculinity and on their psychological wellbeing. All participants reflected on their feelings of embarrassment and shame that were linked to being males that were abused by their female partners, as well as their fear of being judged, mocked and perceived as 'faulty' men. In terms of culture, all the men reflected on the patriarchal views that some cultures hold on to, and argued that these views made their experiences of male victimisation worse. Participants also explained that they were fearful of not being believed, which acted as a barrier to seeking support. Most importantly, several participants reported that they were re-victimised by services that are in place for domestic abuse victims. The findings of this study offer significant insights into the experience of male victimisation in order to increase awareness and understanding of DA against men and enhanced support services.

## Introduction

The following literature review explores research concerning domestic abuse (DA) and in particular, the experience of male victimisation in terms of female-perpetrated DA. The review firstly presents an outline of DA that highlights the gendered perceptions that exist on DA. Following this, a summary of the impacts of DA is provided. The review then concentrates on the issue of male victimisation by presenting the prevalence, the nature and severity of abuse against men, the barriers that male victims face when ending their abusive relationship and the help-seeking behaviours of male victims. The subject of male victimisation from a cultural perspective is then examined by taking into consideration the Cypriot cultural background and the cultural understandings that Cypriots hold on gender, DA and victimisation. The review reflects upon the literature specific to gender and masculine identities given the evident links that these concepts have with DA. Finally, an overview of the aims of this study is presented.

As will be revealed, female-perpetrated domestic abuse against men is an issue that received very little attention by scholars and the general public as the majority of the population views DA as an act that is perpetrated by men against women (Lambert, 2011). Several scholars exploring male victimisation note that, male and female victims of DA share a number of commonalities in terms of their experiences and impacts of abuse (Hines, Brown & Dunning, 2007). However, one of the differences often observed in male victims' reports of domestic abuse is that men are re-victimized by numerous services that are in place for DA victims (e.g. police, DA services etc.) due to the fact that these systems are structured to aid female victims (Hines et al., 2007). Furthermore, researchers argue that recognition for male victimisation remains low (McCart, Smith & Sawyer, 2010) thus, as a result of the notions regarding gender roles and DA

victimisation as well as the other issues that will be explored further in the review, male victims of abuse remain 'silent and invisible'.  Consequently, this research aims to explore and understand male victims' experiences of female-perpetrated DA by also taking into consideration the significant aspect of culture in an attempt to make a valid contribution to the existing literature on male victimisation.

**Part 1: Literature Review**

*1.1. Defining Domestic Abuse*

Domestic Abuse (DA) or Domestic Violence (DV), also known as intimate partner violence (IPV), is an issue that has become widely public since it first constituted as a crime in the British Crime Survey (BCS), a national survey of adults in Wales and England that represents victimisation, in 1996.  Prior to this, IPV was perceived as a taboo matter that was kept behind closed doors (Lambert, 2011).  According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2012), most victims of DA are female resulting in men being the majority of perpetrators.  At the same time though, WHO acknowledges that males can also be victims of DV both in heterosexual and same-sex relationships.  Similarly, in the UK, the British Home Office (2007) also acknowledged male victimisation in their definition of IPV by proposing that all regulations are gender neutral: "any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality".  Additionally, the Home Office (2007) launched a fund for male victims of sexual and/or DA in order to enhance awareness of male victimisation and to support services involved with this issue.

Researchers explain that DA lacks an extensive and complete definition, which in turn, results in conflicting categorizations, reports and definitions of abuse and violence (Burzawa & Buzawa, 2003).  As a response to this, Plitcha (2004) stressed the importance of definitional uniformity.  Most often than not, DA is characteristically perceived and discussed as a heterosexual and gendered issue that is frequently physical (Donovan & Hester, 2010).  In turn, this results in the generally held notion that women are the victims of male-perpetrated DA (Barber, 2008).  Importantly, according to

Ristock (2002), this divided way of thinking may hinder the acknowledgment of experiences that are considered different to this dynamic, a finding often reported by male victims of DA within relationships that are heterosexual (Randle & Graham, 2011). Consequently, it is vital that a complete understanding of abuse in relationships is gained (Kelly & Radford, 1990).

'DA' includes all forms of violence (Donovan & Hester, 2010) namely, physical violence, emotional or psychological abuse (undermining self-worth and self-esteem etc.), sexual abuse (e.g. forced sex, sexual criticisms etc.) verbal abuse (e.g. humiliation etc.) social abuse (e.g. isolation from family or/ and friends, preventing victim from going out etc.) and economic/financial abuse (e.g. providing inadequate allowance, no access to bank accounts etc.), (Pence & Paymar, 1996).  It is important to note that victims of DA most commonly experience more than one form of abuse (Coleman, Jansson, Kaiza, & Reed., 2007) and that DA has the highest rate of repeated victimisation of any violent crime (Howard, Trevillion, Khalifeh, Woodall, Rose & Feder, 2010).  What is more, it is of vital importance that, in order to raise public awareness on the various abusive behaviours a victim might suffer but also, of DA in general, definitions of the issue should be expanded to indicate that violence transcends sexuality as well as gender (Finneran & Stephenson, 2013).

### 1.1.1. Research on male victimisation

Authors Kaura and Lohman (2007) note that academics and professionals, within both social and medical sciences, mostly focus and emphasise abuse that has been perpetrated by men against women by looking at the impacts of the abuse on the victims' lives and the support they can receive.  As a result, a widely under researched area of DA is the one which involves violence that has been perpetrated by females

8

towards males (Cook, 2009).  Therefore, males' experiences of DV remain a crucial matter in need of further investigation (WHO, 2013).  Chaudhuri (2012) compared media and academic reports on male victims of DV and concluded that the understanding of male victimisation is inadequate due to the reluctance that still exists in acknowledging and hence, comprehending victimisation past the traditional focus of considering children and women.  Research creates a platform for demystifying the issue and thus, promotes and validates its significance (Chaudhuri, 2012).  Further research on this topic will result in the development of greater understanding of the issue and also, to the clarification of myths that are constructed socially, regarding gender identities and roles as well as victimisation and masculinity (Gadd, Farrall, & Dilmore, 2003).  More importantly, in terms of support for male victims, further research will inform the theory and practice of mental and physical health professionals which will in turn, promote the development of interventions that are gender-specific and suitable for male victims (Hogan, Hegarty, Ward, & Dodd, 2012; Migliaccio, 2002).

It is important to note here that, the present study acknowledges that DA takes place within all situations but, its focus is on male victims of DV that were abused by their female partners.  It is believed that this issue received little discussion due to the complexity surrounding DA (Bograd, 1999) and also, due to the stigma that comes with this matter (Randle & Graham, 2011). Similar issues have been investigated by other studies nevertheless, these mostly focused on the prevalence of male victimisation.

### 1.2. Prevalence of male victimisation and female-perpetrated DA

Gender discrepancies in terms of DA perpetration rates have received a lot of attention (Hester, 2013).  Importantly, female on male abuse has been amongst the most contentious and sensitive issues since the start of empirical research on DV (Hines et al.,

2007).  As Johnson (2006) explains, this is partly due to conservative theories that consider DA to be the product of patriarchal views in society.  Additionally, Hines and Douglas (2010) argue that the use of abusive behaviours preserves the dominance men exert over women within intimate relationships.

Inconsistencies regarding DV prevalence findings have increased arguments in terms of whether female on male violence actually occurs, with contradicting evidence appearing to relate to the instruments and the sampling techniques utilised to gather data as well as the methodologies that have been employed (Kimmel, 2002).  These inconsistent findings have resulted in divided evidence, with some studies concluding that men are predominantly the perpetrators of DA, whilst other studies have found limited gender discrepancies in DA perpetration (Dobash & Dobash, 2004).

Similar to the above, Lambert (2011) suggests that, not only academics and professionals view men as predominantly the perpetrators of DA but the majority of society also believes that women are the victims and men the perpetrators of DV.  The author also adds that most people do not recognise that males can also be victims of DA in the same way as females.  The 'battered husband syndrome' was first introduced back in the late 1970's (Steinmatz, 1977) and is still considered a taboo matter nowadays.

Recent research that explored and identified literature that is linked to the position of male victims of DA in Scotland concluded that, it is clear that a significant problem exists in the country in relation to DV against men (Dempsey, 2013).  More specifically, it was reported that during 2011-2012, 9,569 reports were made to the police about DV incidences against male partners (Dempsey, 2013). In addition, statistics in Britain reported by the ManKind Initiative (2008), a national charity that provides support and

help for male victims of DV, indicate that for every five victims of abuse three are female and two are male.  These statistics also reveal that, 2.7 million male victims have experienced DV since the age of 16. Partner abuse has been the most frequent type of intimate violence among both males and females with 517,000 male and 845,000 female victims in 2012/2013.  Moreover, in 2012 – 2013, more cohabiting men (4.0%) and married men (1.5%) suffered from partner abuse than cohabiting women (3.4%) and married women (1.3%). The ManKind Initiative (2008) also reports that of those who suffered DA in 2012 – 2013, more men suffered from severe force (34%) than women (28%). Finally, male victims (29%) are nearly twice as likely than women (17%) to not tell anyone about the partner abuse. Only 10% of male victims will tell the police and 22% will tell a person in an official position.  Furthermore, only 10% will tell a health professional.  Although one might argue that these findings were reported some time ago they still constitute as evidence that male victimisation actually exists and that, incidences of DA against men continue to rise.   The help-seeking behaviours of male victims and the support available to them will be discussed later on in this literature review.  Statistics on the prevalence of DA in Cyprus will be presented in a section below.

To address the contradictory findings on the prevalence of female-perpetrated DA and generally on male victimisation, researchers Dobash and Dobash (2004) explained that there are two separate approaches to DA research.  The first approach being 'family violence' research that has the focus of examining the prevalence of DV for both men and women (Esquivel-Santoveña & Dixon, 2012) while the second approach is known as 'violence against woman' research that focuses on investigating the frequency of DA against females only (Alhabib, Nur & Jones, 2010).  Researchers employing the first approach, which is an 'act-based' approach to exploring violence within intimate partner

relationships, measure the reported injuries and acts of abuse within the intimate

relationship from both the side of the perpetrator but also, of the victim.  This is done by

utilising a number of scales that have been developed to assess partners' use of abuse

(Dobash & Dobash, 2004).  The results of such studies are then utilised to assess female

and males' use of abusive behaviours within the general population.  A number of

researchers that adopt the 'act-based' approach have found that the perpetration of DV

amongst female and male partners is symmetrical.  In other words, women are as likely

as men to perpetrate DA in intimate relationships (Hines & Saudino, 2003).  Moreover,

results in some cases, indicated that women use extensive abusive behaviours against

men (Morse, 1995).

The 'Conflict Tactic Scale', which is a questionnaire that examines violent behaviours

between intimate partners, is very well known and extensively used in violence within

the family surveys (Dobash & Dobash, 2004).  Interestingly, measures based on certain

abusive behaviours indicate that female partners are considerably more likely than male

partners to engage in physical abusive behaviours against their intimate partners

(Archer, 2000).  On the other hand, it has been suggested that the likelihood of men to

inflict injury against women is considerably higher (Archer, 2000).  Researchers argue

that family violence surveys demonstrate thorough methodological rigour as they are

explicitly designed to explore family violence instead of the association between broader

social problems and abuse (Esquivel-Santoveña & Dixon, 2012).  In particular, the

findings of family violence surveys demonstrate rates of victimisation across both female

and male victims that are more equal whereas, measures that do not demonstrate such

quality, reflect rates of male perpetration and female victimisation that are higher

(Esquivel-Santoveña & Dixon, 2012).  Therefore, Esquivel-Santoveña and Dixon (2012)

stress the importance of having a method to the exploration and measurement of DV

that is more gender inclusive, given the frequently reported increased stigma surrounding the identification of men as victims of DA (Hamby, 2005).

Researchers that critique the 'act-based' approach point out that the notion that both perpetrators and victims will give accurate and trustworthy descriptions of their relationship, as an indication for the prevalence of DA, is problematic (Dobash & Dobash, 2001). Interestingly though, according to Hester (2013), female partners are more likely to account for using violence, compared to males. Moreover, it has been argued that the emphasis placed on 'acts' without mentioning the impact of injury and context has resulted in the difficulty to distinguish the experiences of women and men that are victims of DV (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Therefore, researchers adopting the 'violence against women' approach recommend that abuse should be investigated within the impacts and context that it occurs in and by including on-going abusive episodes that have been overlooked by 'act-based' approaches (Dobash & Dobash, 2004).

The BCS reports that male partners are less likely to share their DA experiences with the police as their incidents are regarded as more trivial (Osborne et al., 2010). A number of researchers state that DV statistics overestimate the status of male victims as they explain that inconsistencies in gender disparities regarding DA victimisation have been utilised by numerous 'men's rights' advocates to undermine support services and projects that are in place for female victims (Gadd et al., 2003a). Consequently, researchers Dobash and Dobash (2004) argued that policies, which address abuse against women, should continue to be given priority. Despite the fact that male partners may be less likely than women to be victims of DA, it is important to conduct further research on this issue with the purpose of gaining a complete understanding of

male victimisation (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Although evidence indicates that male victimisation and female perpetration of DV does exist (Carmo, Grams & Magalhães, 2011; Hines et al., 2007), there still is uncertainty surrounding the prevalence of these violent intimate relationships (Hines & Douglas, 2010), given that a rigorous measure of DA prevalence does not exist (Alhabib et al., 2010).

### 1.3. The impact of DV

The World Health Organisation (2013) describes DV as a huge health and social problem that is related to severe psychological and physical difficulties. Various studies highlight the damaging effects of DA on both mental and physical health (e.g. Campbell, Sullivan & Davison, 1995; Hines & Douglas, 2011; Merill & Wolfe, 2000).

The most prevalent psychological consequences of DV are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Howard, Trevillion & Davies, 2010). In addition, DA is closely linked to social dysfunction, eating disorders, suicidal ideation and sleep disorders (Olshen, McVeigh, Wunsch-Hitzig & Rickert, 2007), as well as substance misuse, anxiety, panic disorders and self-harm (Valpied & Hegarty, 2015). Campbell (2002) noted that the psychological consequences of DA continue for a long time after the end of the experience. However, studies like these, concentrate on the impact of DV on female victims and as a result, awareness and understanding of the impact of DA on male victims is limited.

In their study, Hines et al. (2007) found that many of the experiences and impacts that male victims of DV report resemble the experiences and effects reported by female victims. Nonetheless, the authors argue that experiences were different in that their male participants described being re-victimised due to systems that had been structured

14

exclusively to aid female victims. The male participants also added that, when seeking help, many accused them of being the perpetrators as well as the fact that they were treated with disbelief and suspicion.

### 1.4. Differences in gendered experiences – Gender and Masculine Identities

A debate that is linked with DA is whether there is 'gender symmetry' whereby both female and male partners initiate the abuse equally (Malloy et al., 2003) or whether there is 'gender asymmetry' where males are usually the perpetrators of the abuse (Dobash and Dobash, 2004).  The Crime Survey of England and Wales (2013) estimated that during 2012 and 2013, 7% of women and 4% of men suffered DV. More particularly, these statistics are equivalent to 1.2 million female and 700,000 male victims of DA during the years mentioned above. According to the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS, 2015), in Cyprus, from the 1148 incidences of DA reported in 2009, 83% were female and 8.6% were male victims. Thus, it seems that these statistics support the theory of 'gender asymmetry' where men tend to be the perpetrators of violence compared to females. However, as Lambert (2011) argued, one must take into consideration that, for a number of reasons, male victims tend not to report the incidences of DV towards them as well as the fact that female partners in lesbian relationships may have abused some of the female victims that are reflected in the above statistics. Consequently, it is probable that the statistics suggested in the Crime Survey of England and Wales as well as in the MIGS considerably underestimate the actual extent of male victimisation (Lambert, 2011).

Nevertheless, family violence researchers support the theory of 'gender symmetry' when it comes to DV issues (Malloy et al., 2003). According to the ManKind Initiative in 2012 – 2013, 21% of men and 21% of women suffered three or more incidents of

partner abuse. These results suggest that both partners equally instigate abuse (Lambert, 2011). Family violence researchers claim that both women and men who instigate DA have similar experiences, characteristics and motivations thus, these researchers argue that both genders can be instigators of abuse (Malloy et al., 2003).

From the above, one can notice that the theory which supports 'gender asymmetry' hence the notion that males tend to be offenders of DA rather than considering that females can also be offenders of this phenomenon creates a gender bias based on stereotypes (Lambert, 2011). Lambert (2011) argues that by doing this one moves away from the fact that DA is a human capacity rather than a gender specific problem.

The Home Office (2007) supports the view that DA is a 'gender issue' due to the fact that the initiatives the government employed mostly promote the needs of female victims. According to the Mankind Initiative (2008) DV is surrounded with bias as only 12 organisations offer refuge or safe house provision to male victims of DV compared to the 260 organisations that offer refuge to female victims. Furthermore, it has been argued that, this female-oriented bias may be taken advantage of by a number of organisations that help female victims (Lambert, 2011). Lambert (2011) states that this should not have been the case, as DV should be regarded as a 'human issue' where these organisations provide support and help to all victims of DA regardless of their gender.

Edwards and Roces (2006) noted that, gender is "an ideology people use in modern societies to imagine the existence of differences between men and women on the basis of their sex where in fact there are none" (p.20). According to Palin-Davis (2006), society negatively impacts male victims of DA in that traditionally, females were underprivileged given the role males held in society who were the breadwinners and thus, controlled

16

what took place in the household and females were the nurturers. Lambert (2011) writes "these stereotypical views are instilled in society and reflected repeatedly by the media so people are reluctant to believe that women could perpetrate violence as men are the dominant sex" (p. 11). According to George (2002), male victims that were abused by their partners were publicly humiliated to obey the roles society gave them in that females are subordinate and males are the dominant sex.  As a result of these views, male victims are kept invisible as they are repressed by society (Lambert, 2011).

Ideas of masculinity impact on the view that men are the offenders of DA as they involve men asserting their dominance over women but, these ideas also have an effect on why men that are victims of DA rarely ask for support or help (Lambert, 2011). The confidence and self esteem of male victims deteriorates because of the violence and so, they are hesitant to get support but they also want the outside world to still perceive them as 'manly' (Lambert, 2011). The notion of patriarchy has been embedded in society (Palin-Davis, 2006) and this has been termed by Connel (2005) as 'hegemonic masculinity' where society viewed women as inferior to men. According to Connel (2005), this concept is what men are striving to support and what maintains their power. Hagene (2010) explains that women can take control and be seen as superior if men are not able to maintain their power. This will leave men feeling unworthy and inferior to women and in turn, this will generate ambiguity amongst the gender roles (Hagene, 2010). The author also adds that a man will no longer be a man if he fails at patriarchy. When the gender constructions mentioned above are challenged by women, an issue of pride is created for men where they are left feeling less masculine and thus, ashamed (Lambert, 2011).

One of the reasons why male victims tend not to disclose that their partners abused them is that they still want to feel masculine and retain their ideas of masculinity (Lambert, 2011). According to Lyon, Bradshaw and Menard (2011), a number of male victims do not seek support because of their feelings of shame and the male victims that do seek advice and help from social services or the police are often stigmatised and ridiculed, as these agencies do not believe that men can be also victims of DA due to societal norms. Lambert (2011) argues that people tend to ignore information that is not in line with societal stereotypes. Supporting this evidence, Migliacco (2002) also supports that male victims are left feeling embarrassed and shameful due to the challenges they face to their ideas of masculinity after victimisation. The men that took part in Migliacco's study argued that they did not ask for help, even if they needed it, because society perceives males as self-reliant so they would be stigmatised as being weak. In contrast to female victims of DA, the main reason why the participants did not disclose their abuse was underpinned by their need to support their male identities. As a consequence, the victims were suffering prolonged abuse before they finally asked for help.

### 1.5. Experiences of male victims

#### 1.5.1. Severity and nature of abuse perpetrated by women against men

A number of arguments exist in relation to the severity and nature of abuse within heterosexual intimate relationships (Afifi et al., 2009).  Several of these arguments indicate that men are more likely to use physical force or reciprocate with threats compared to women (Coker et al., 2002).  On the other hand, some suggest that both parties of an intimate relationship may be mutually violent, with both the male and female partner of the relationship adopting the perpetrator and victim roles (Carney, Buttel & Dutton, 2007).

In 2006, Johnson endeavoured to grasp a better conceptualization of the numerous dynamics of control and of the nature of abuse in intimate relationships so, he established that there are four separate forms of DV: situational couple violence, violent resistance, mutual violent control and intimate terrorism.

Firstly, the type of abuse known as situational couple violence refers to partners of an intimate relationship who are both neither violent nor controlling.  In this case, violent behaviours may be exhibited as a result of intensified conflict between the couple (Johnson, 2006).  Secondly, the other type of abuse that Johnson (2006) established known as violent resistance, refers to partners of intimate relationships that are violent but not controlling against a partner who exhibits both violent and controlling behaviours.  In other words, violence is shown as a response of resistance to the partner that endeavours to assert control in an intimate relationship.  Furthermore, the third type of abuse namely, mutual violent control, is used in relation to intimate relationships in which controlling and violent behaviours are exhibited by both partners (Johnson, 2006).  Finally, intimate terrorism is the type of abuse in which only one partner of an intimate relationship shows both controlling and violent behaviours against their partner.  Evidence highlights that victims of this type of abuse experience prolonged violent behaviours against them and are attacked at a more frequent rate, which consequently means that it is more probable that these victims are injured more frequently and suffer more in terms of their mental and physical health as a result of the abuse they experience (Johnson, 2006).  It is also more probable for victims of intimate terrorism to seek support from official sources such as from counselling and medical services, the police as well as from their social environment (i.e. friends and family).

Johnson (2006) stated that distinctions in the escalation, frequency, mutuality and severity of DA have crucial consequences in terms of the interpretation of numerous research outcomes. For instance, the researcher claimed that male and female partners that engage in situational couple violence are most often represented by broad surveys as they frequently participate in these rather than other types of research in order to voice and share their experiences of abuse. Nevertheless, the nature of this type of abuse that is situation specific implies that these couples are less likely to seek support from specialist organisations and access emergency services and as a result, they are considered as research samples that concentrate on emergency assistance (Johnson, 2006). Contrastingly, victims of the other two types of abuse, namely violent resistance and intimate terrorism, are less likely to participate in these surveys out of a fear of retaliation. These victims most often seek to access specialist agency and court services as these types of DV entail greater severity and frequency and thus are most frequently considered within crime, specialist agency and emergency service samples (Johnson, 2006). The researcher then concluded that research findings which fail to distinguish and take into consideration the differences between the severity and nature of DA descriptions for gender inconsistencies of perpetration rates as well as the important differences between the impacts, development and causes of DA should be considered with caution.

The author argued that intimate terrorism is the type of abuse that is mostly perpetrated by male partners whereas violent resistance is the type of abuse that is more frequently perpetrated by women in relationships that are heterosexual (Johnson, 2006). Moreover, he suggested that, within the situational couple violence type of abuse, male partners are mainly more violent than female partners. Nonetheless, Hines and Douglas (2010) warn that it is important to take into consideration that the

experience of abuse and intimate terrorism of male victims is persistently an under-researched area. Interestingly, in 2010, the researchers conducted a study in which they explored male victims' experiences of female-perpetrated intimate terrorism and abuse and concluded that these issues should be considered seriously as a number of male partners do experience this type of abuse.

### 1.5.2. Psychological and emotional abuse against men

Researchers Williams, Ghandour and Kub (2008) conducted a review of empirical research on violence that was perpetrated by female partners in heterosexual relationships and concluded that psychological abuse was the type of abuse most commonly perpetrated by female partners. It has been reported that the most frequently used types of emotional abuse perpetrated by women against men include threats to remove or harm children, blackmailing, threats regarding murder or suicide and self-harm, falsely accusing the victim of being the perpetrator and deceitfully procuring restraining orders against the male victim (Drijber, Reijnders & Ceelen, 2013; Hines et al., 2007; Hines & Saudino, 2003). A number of male victims mentioned that they do not react to these types of psychological abuse as they are either afraid of losing their children or of being arrested by the police and also due to moral and value based oppositions of utilising physical power against their female partners (Cook, 2009).

Drijber and colleagues (2013) argued that there is a vagueness regarding the psychological impacts of DA and also, emotional abuse on male victims. Hines and Douglas (2010) conducted a quantitative study, which was the first study to produce evidence regarding the psychological impacts of DV on men, in order to examine the relationship between the experience of DV and PTSD with a clinical sample of male victims who suffered female-perpetrated abuse. The researchers reported that PTSD is

a considerable matter among male victims of DA.  Nonetheless, Hines & Saudino (2003) argue that not a lot of evidence exists of the impacts of DA on the mental health of men to be able to confidently talk about the psychological impacts.  Although some evidence exists which supports the relationship between DV and poor psychological health consequences for both women and men that suffered DA (Afifi et al., 2009), further research needs to be conducted in order to investigate the emotional impacts on male victims (Drijber et al., 2013).

### 1.5.3. Physical abuse against men

A common notion exists which supports that, due to the fact that men are mostly physically stronger and bigger than women, they are able to restrain their female partners or wives making it easier for them flee an incidence of abuse without getting injured or becoming physically restrained by their female partners (Hines & Douglas, 2010).  As a result of this notion and as mentioned previously, it is likely that the violence inflicted by women on their male partners might be trivialised or considered less serious and in some cases, people might even find it something to make fun of (Saunders, 2002).  More importantly, the common held notion that male partners are able to easily defend themselves against their female partners brings about societal shared assumptions that it is impossible for men who are considered 'real' and 'actual' men to be victims of such abuse by women (Yarrow & Churchill, 2009).  It is important however to note that some findings show that female partners most often adopt types of violence that are not dependent on strength (George, 2002).  For example, findings illustrate that a number of female partners utilise a variety of physical objects in assaults against men including tableware, knives and sharp objects as well as chairs (Drijber et al., 2013).  Additionally, evidence suggests that women are capable of exhibiting

incredibly severe physical abuse tactics such as biting, kicking, stabbing, hitting, chocking, punching, stalking and scratching (Drijber et al., 2013; Hines et al., 2007).

The consequences of attacks like these against men by their female partners have been the high and serious rates of DV within intimate relationships including sexual, physical and psychological violence (Dutton, 2007; Hines & Douglas, 2010; Hogan, 2016; Williams et al., 2008) with a number of male victims mentioning that they were constantly fearful of their female partners' abusive nature (Hines et al., 2007; Hogan, 2016).

### 1.5.4. Barriers to ending a violent relationship

Research on the reasons why a number of female victims continue to stay in violent relationships has been extensively conducted (e.g. Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod & Ng, 2003). However, very limited research exists and hence, a limited understanding relating to the reasons behind why male victims remain in a relationship with abusive partners (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). Unempirical evidence has suggested that male partners experience common barriers to ending an abusive relationship such as fears about the welfare and safety of children, embarrassment and shame, limited financial resources and a commitment to their partner as well as the intimate relationship (Cook, 2009). Nevertheless, Hines and Malley-Morrison (2001) argue that further studies need to be conducted that investigate the barriers male victims experience to ending their relationships with their abusive partners.

### 1.5.5. Help-seeking behaviours and support for male victims

A large amount of research has indicated that the uncertainty men experience when seeking help and support is closely linked with adherence to the ideologies, notions and social norms that exist regarding masculinity (Addis, Green, Mackowiak & Goldberg,

2013).  These notions support the belief that men need to be self-reliant, in control, tolerant and emotionally impassive (Nam et al., 2010) and these ideologies are commonly perceived by the majority of men as being in contrast with support seeking behaviours.  Nam and colleagues (2010) conducted a meta-analysis relating to support seeking attitudes and concluded that gender is an important predictor of notions and outlooks held towards seeking support.  More specifically, the researchers argued that women mostly hold more positive outlooks towards seeking support compared to men. Therefore, the recognition of needing support, and hence, dependence on other individuals (Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer & Hubbard, 2011), and the related stigma of receiving support (Nam et al., 2010), may lead a number of men to perceive support seeking as their failure to follow the standards of masculinity they hold (Vogel et al., 2011).  On the other hand, it has been proposed that the manner, nature and source in which support is provided may aid men in being open to seeking support (Berger, Addis, Green, Mackowiak & Goldberg, 2013).  At the same time, findings indicate that men's responses to psychotherapy are generally more positive due to the emphasis it places on sustaining a sense of self-reliance and independence (Berger et al., 2013).

Very little evidence exists that explores male victims' experiences of seeking support regarding DV which was perpetrated by their female partners (McCart, et., 2010).  The up to date accounts related to this matter portray a representation of complexity that is underlined by external and internal obstacles, which male victims face such as embarrassment and shame, as well as a limited knowledge of suitable services that offer support (Douglas & Hines, 2011).  Similarly, in their survey about how and why male victims seek support, Tsui, Cheung and Leung (2010) found that male victims of DA didn't seek support as they felt ashamed of being unable to protect and defend themselves from their partners and also, because of the supposed threats to their male

identity. More particularly, the researchers reported that the male participants were fearful of minimising their respect and dignity whilst they also believed that seeking support relating to their experience of victimisation and abuse was a sign of weakness and this in turn, brought about feelings of embarrassment. Other researchers found that abused men assumed that services that provide support would not be able to help them (Hines & Douglas, 2010). Importantly, findings also highlight that abused men were fearful of being humiliated and mocked, of not being taken seriously due to their experience of victimisation by their female partners but also, of being wrongly accused as the perpetrator in the case that they sought support (Drijber et al., 2013). As a result, Drijber and colleagues (2013) argued that it is more probable for men to share their experience of abuse with people who they trusted would keep their experience private and a secret, such as friends or family, instead of seeking support from services.

In addition to the above, it has also been suggested that as result of this lack of recognition for male victimisation, men have to manage without much support, guidance and help (McCart et al., 2010). As mentioned above, Donovan and Hester (2010) also explain that there are a number of practical obstacles to men reporting the violence. However, the authors also introduced the notion of the 'public story' of DV that presents DV as an act that male perpetrators inflict on female partners and, this is in line with Lambert's (2011) argument in that society and academics perceive DV as an act perpetrated by men. Furthermore, other obstacles also include the lack of support services that are accessible to male victims as well as the psychological obstacles mentioned above such as embarrassment and fear of not being believed (Dovan & Hester, 2010).

Earlier research accepted that females can create an environment of fear for their partners because of their violence, but suggested that the evidence was not sufficient to show that this was a large issue as it was with women (Pagelow, 1992). In 2003, Gadd and colleagues supported Pagelow's (1992) suggestions as they conducted a survey regarding male victimisation in Scotland and came to the conclusion that male victims of DV do not amount to a sizeable population so they are in no need of support services as female victims. Nonetheless, the sample size of this survey was to small thus not representative of the population in order to draw any meaningful information. In addition to this, the findings of the survey are in contrast to more recent statistics, presented earlier, which suggest that a significant problem exists in Scotland in terms of male victimisation (Dempsey, 2013). Many may argue that the sample size of the current research is also small but it is really important to have in mind the focus and emphasis of the study. The aim of the this study is to explore and gain an understanding into the experiences of male victims of DA and gather rich and in-depth data rather than aiming to generalise to the population.

Interestingly, evidence on the experiences of male victims of DA who sought support indicated that the fears male victims experienced were not erroneous (Hogan, 2016). In particular, abused men reported that the support they were provided with was gender stereotypical, as it seemed to be based on the belief that men are the perpetrators of abuse. Male victims also explained that they experienced reduced access to sources of support that was suitable for their needs as male victims (Douglas & Hines, 2010). Therefore, a number of male victims reported being treated with doubt, disbelief and suspicion and at the same time, they were mocked when they sought support (Douglas & Hines, 2011; Tsui et al., 2010). The way these men were treated also led to the feeling of isolation as they had to prove their experiences of being victims of abuse and because

their accounts were treated with disbelief (Hines et al., 2007). Most importantly, the male victims were also rejected or, as mentioned above, mocked by the organisations and support services they approached for help (Cook, 2009). The negative experiences male victims are faced with when seeking support for their victimisation have resulted in significant and long lasting impacts on their psychological health that in turn, bring about higher percentages of PTSD (Hogan, 2016). Finally, it has been shown that the relationship between PTSD and tolerating DA was greater in cases were male victims faced more hostility when sharing their stories (Hines, 2007).

### *1.6. The impact of gender stereotypes and gendered political narrative*

Although DA can occur in any type of relationship, cases involving non-prototypical abuse (e.g. female-on-male, lesbian, gay male) are frequently overlooked (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). Recent research has established that perceptions of same-sex and heterosexual DA are largely in line with gender role stereotypes (Seelau & Seelau, 2005) as well as that the sex of the victim, perpetrator and respondent/observer impacts perceptions of DV (Poorman, Seelau & Seelau, 2003) in a way that may have damaging effects on how the DV case is treated by the public, criminal justice, social service, mental health system and so on.

Studies investigating sexual orientation and gender role perceptions of DA have demonstrated that the victim's gender is the strongest predictor of responses to DV, rather than sexual orientation (Seelau & Seelau, 2005) and predominantly influences these responses (Seelau, Seelau & Poorman, 2003). In four similar studies, conducted by researchers Ahmed, Aldén & Hammarstedt (2013), Poorman et al. (2003), Seelau et al. (2003) and Seelau and Seelau (2005), participants read DV cases wherein perpetrators and victims varied by gender and hence, sexual orientation. The results of the four

studies were consistent with existing literature on the matter (e.g. Feather, 1996; Harris

& Cook, 1994) as they indicated that, DV is surrounded with gender role stereotypes in

that DA against women or perpetrated by males is deemed more serious than abuse

against males or perpetrated by females (Ahmed et al., 2013; Poorman et al., 2003;

Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005).  Furthermore, DA involving female victims

was perceived as the most serious form of DA compared to DA involving male victims

that was considered as less serious and DV perpetrated against females was seen as

deserving of outside intervention compared to DV perpetrated against males (Poorman

et al., 2003; Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005).  Additionally, participants

reported being more concerned about the violence perpetrated against females

compared to violence against men (Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005).  In

Ahmed's et al. (2013) study the results also indicated that DV scenarios involving lesbian

and gay relationships were seen as more serious than DV scenarios involving

heterosexual relationships where the perpetrator was female and the victim was male.

Seelau et al. (2003) suggested that the public might find it challenging to think about

males as victims, as this is antithetical to conventional gender role stereotypes.

Moreover, the authors argued that the public is less likely to identify an incident as

abusive if it is not in line with the stereotypical scenario of abuse perpetrated by men

against women.  The researchers also explained that the 'victim' label does not apply

similarly to women and men in DA incidences as our gendered narrative and the gender

role stereotypes we hold, relating to social functions as well as power in romantic

relationships, justify the different perceptions that exist.  Their study supported the

notion that conventional gender role stereotypes of men as 'non-vulnerable victimizers'

and women as 'vulnerable and helpless victims' exist and that these stereotypes

interfere with the public's judgements given that their participants were more

concerned about female victims.  Participants' beliefs regarding the responsibility of the victim for the altercation further supported the gender role stereotype account as they perceived the victim as more responsible for the altercation when the perpetrator was female than male (Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005).  This can be explained by the fact that, as the scholars suggest, based on gendered narrative and gender role perceptions, the public expects males to be and act more aggressively than females, particularly when the incident involves physical abuse and results in the victim being physically harmed.  Consequently, many believe that when a woman does not follow conventional gender roles and physically assaults her male partner, she was surely provoked so, to simplify, the male victim acted in a way that caused aggressive behaviour from his female partner (Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005).  In other words, the victims were perceived as less responsible for the altercation when the perpetrator was male given that aggressive behaviours expressed by males are more consistent with the stereotypes we hold (Seelau et al., 2003).  Similarly, Poorman et al. (2003) also argued that male perpetrators are perceived as more responsible for the violence, especially when the victim is female.

Further supporting the argument that DV is surrounded by gender role stereotypes is that, in both Seelau and Seelau's (2005) and Seelau et al. (2003) studies, participants perceived the violence perpetrated by a female as less physically damaging compared to the violence perpetrated by a male and that women were more likely than men to suffer serious injuries.  As the researchers note, based on the gender role stereotypes that the public holds of males as aggressive, strong and dominant and thus, in line with the abuser role, people perceive male perpetrators as possibly more threatening and capable of inflicting injury.  This also explains the finding that many consider outside intervention as more necessary when the perpetrator is a man (Seelau & Seelau, 2005;

Seelau et al., 2003).  Poorman et al. (2003) further investigated the participants' expectations of future issues within the couple of the abuse scenarios they were given. The authors reported that the participants believed future issues would occur in scenarios involving female perpetrators therefore, they concluded that this might be partly due to gender role stereotypes of men being more capable of defending themselves against female perpetrators or of leaving.  Interestingly and in contrast to this, Seelau and Seelau (2005) found that their participants perceived the likelihood of another altercation higher when the victim was female rather than male given the masculine stereotype of being more threatening.

The above studies indicate that gender stereotypes relating to DA do exist (Poorman et al., 2003) and that these can influence our perceptions of DA in terms of what constitutes seriousness of an incident, responsibility for the altercation and so on.  As Poorman et al. (2003) suggest, it seems that victims of DV may be perceived as more responsible, less believable and the violence against them as less serious whenever a DV incident does not follow normative expectations of gender roles.  Moreover, incidents of DA that do not fit these expectations may lead some people to even question the usefulness of justice system responses or the criminality of the act (Poorman et al., 2003).  Indeed, as Seelau and Seelau (2005) argue, evidence exists which illustrates that the gender of the victim and perpetrator impact criminal justice responses to DA.  For example, Connoly, Huzurbazar and Routh-McGee (2000) argued that although the courts and police are encouraged in general to treat all DV cases as any other violent crime, police often fail to enforce protective orders and are less likely to intervene and arrest perpetrators in cases not involving male on female abuse.  Furthermore, it has been reported that the legal system frequently lacks in responding to or recognizing cases involving male victims of DA as research has highlighted that mock-juror judgements

involving heterosexual DA are influenced by the genders of the victim and perpetrator in a way that female on male abuse is perceived less negatively than male on female abuse (Seelau et al., 2003). This, as Connoly et al. (2000) explain, may be partly due to stereotypes the police and legal system holds on gender roles in that males cannot be abused and females cannot be abusers.

As Seelau and Seelau (2005) note, we can assume that attorneys, health care workers, witnesses, judges and the wider public hold the same attitudes given that police officers do as well and this may result in many victims and perpetrators of non-normative DA, such as male victims and female perpetrators, being treated differently and not receiving equitable protection and treatment under the law. Studies continuously illustrate that these attitudes are indeed held by the majority of the population as participants frequently report that they perceive incidents involving male victims as less violent and hence, less in need of outside intervention (e.g. by police) than incidents involving female victims (Seelau et al., 2003). These result patterns indicate that male victims are seen with less sympathy from the public (Seelau et al., 2003) compared to when the victim is female in which case, people show a desire to protect or to assist them (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). In line with this, and relating to perceptions of best resolutions to incidents of DV, participants report being more likely to contact a DV hotline or the police and less likely to leave the couple alone in cases involving female victims (Poorman et al., 2003; Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005) whereas in cases involving male victims, participants report attempting to talk to the couple or just leaving the couple alone as their responses (Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). Therefore, most participants recommend that female victims are in need of greater outside intervention in order to resolve the incident (Seelau et al., 2003) and of a response that is more active compared to men that are perceived as less vulnerable

hence, in need of less active interventions (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). In particular,

research has demonstrated that people judge male perpetrators as more deserving of

conviction and of sentences that are more severe compared to female perpetrators

(Poorman et al., 2003). For example, participants' recommended police responses to an

incident of abuse were that the police arrest or issue a citation to the perpetrator when

the victim was female compared to male whereby the recommended response was to

talk to the couple or give them a warning (Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005).

Gender stereotypes and biases against victims of DV that are male, can also negatively

influence discretionary decisions at certain or all points in the justice system process

(Seelau et al., 2003). As highlighted throughout this section, the general public seems to

be more sensitive to women that have been abused by their partners, but do not appear

to be as concerned about male victims (Seelau et al., 2003). In the case that this way of

thinking also prevails within the criminal justice system, as mentioned earlier, it appears

unlikely that male victims will be treated equally in court (Seelau et al., 2003). Indeed,

research has demonstrated that participants find the perpetrator guilty of DA when the

victim is a woman compared to when the victim is a man (Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau &

Seelau, 2005). Likewise, participants report being more likely to recommend that

women who have been victims of male perpetrated DV press charges than men who

have been victims of the same crime perpetrated by women (Poorman et al., 2003).

Verdict and sentence perceptions also follow the same pattern in that male perpetrators

are seen as deserving significantly more sever and higher penalties compared to female

perpetrators (Poorman et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). In general, people believe

that the criminal justice system should intervene predominantly in cases involving male

perpetrators and female victims (Poorman et al., 2003). Research has even illustrated

that therapists and counsellors are more likely to suggest pressing charges to male perpetrators than female perpetrators (Poorman et al., 2003).

The results of the studies presented above suggest that DA is surrounded by gender role stereotypes and that, our gendered narrative and perceptions of how each gender should act, influence our views regarding DV cases. Research on the influence of gender stereotypes has implications for the perceptions of the public regarding DV as well as for mental health, social service and criminal justice system responses to male DA victimisation (Poorman et al., 2003). Male victims of DA may come across police officers, intake workers, dispatchers, social workers, therapists, psychologists, jurors, attorneys, or judges who deem their cases and experiences of DV as less serious, their accounts as not that believable and hence, may be more inclined to recommend that there is no need for them to press charges (Poorman et al., 2003). Suitable responses to a case of abuse may be delayed if an intake worker, dispatcher or officer considers a call less serious (Poorman et al., 2003) on the basis that the victim is male and does not fit their expected gender roles. Coupled with evidence suggesting that male victims are often minimised, treated with disbelief and suspicion and have, in some circumstances, been accused of being the perpetrators of DV instead of victims (Hines et al., 2007), the possibility of the perpetrator not being charged or of receiving less support may hinder male victims from contacting someone for support or the criminal justice system for assistance and protection (Poorman et al., 2003). Additionally, the criminal justice system, police officers, mental health workers and so on should be concerned about the possibility that men who have been victims of DV may be treated inequitably (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). The people who took part in the studies mentioned above, believed that male victims were not that seriously harmed compared to women. It is of vital importance that this perceived extent of injury should not determine whether or not

victims receive support and protection in real-life cases of DA as both female and male victims have the right to be treated equally (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). Even though fewer cases of DV involving male victims and female perpetrators come to light for a number of reasons, statistics still highlight that they tend to be equally as serious as cases involving male perpetrators and female victims (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). Efforts should be made to increase awareness that will assist in educating policy makers (Ahmed et al., 2013), primary contact officials (e.g. mental health workers, police officers), the criminal justice system and the general public about the realities of DA (Seelau et al., 2003) and the damaging effects DA can have on all victims, irrespective of their gender (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). The more we increase our understanding and awareness of perceptions on DV, the more we can accomplish in order to provide fair and equal treatment and protection to all DV cases.

### *1.7. Cultural influences and Cypriot understandings – The case of DV and male victimisation in Cyprus*

Peristianis et al. (2011) argue that during the past decades, the Cypriot society has seen a transformation in its ideologies around religion, sexuality, gender roles, masculinities/femininities etc. and the effects of this transformation are apparent. However, the researchers note that the Cypriot family system and the roles of each member of the family have not changed to a great extent as in other developed societies. The results of their study indicated that, in the Cypriot society, women still have the majority of responsibilities related to the household whether they are in employment or not, leaving men with a secondary role. Only a small number of men started to take up responsibilities in the household and according to Peristianis et al. (2011), this might be attributed to the fact that the younger and more educated Cypriot generations started to slowly reject some of the characteristics of the patriarchal

attitudes the Cypriot society held.  In addition, nowadays most Cypriot women are in employment and contribute to the family's income compared to a few decades back when most women were housewives.  However, as the authors argue men are still seen as the main contributors and 'breadwinners' of the household where they make most of the decisions for the family.  This indicates that the Cypriot society still holds on to some of the aspects of patriarchal attitudes.  As a result of this, as Apostolidou, Mavrikiou and Parlaris (2014) argue, the ideas of masculinity in Cyprus are a product of the sociocultural beliefs that exist where males hold a number of patriarchal attitudes that give them a position of power within the family making them the dominant sex.  For this reason, as mentioned throughout the literature review, many violent incidents towards men never come to light as these ideas of masculinity will be challenged and men will be left feeling powerless and shamed (Apostolidou et al., 2014).

National statistics on the prevalence of DA in Cyprus are limited as the only available statistics are those gathered by the Association For the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO), a national based organisation that provides a hotline for DA and two shelters for female victims, and also, by the Cyprus police (Kaili & Pavlou, 2010).  It is important to note here that, the data which have been reported on the prevalence of DV and that will presented below should be considered with caution as the statistics that exist only make it possible to illustrate the trend in reported cases of DA but, do not portray a complete picture of the prevalence of DA in Cyprus (Kaili & Pavlou, 2010).

Statistics on the prevalence of reported DA incidences have seen a dramatic increase in the past decade.  Police data illustrate that reported cases of DA in Cyprus almost doubled between 2002 to 2008 with 538 and 959 cases correspondingly (Kaili & Pavlou,

2010).  Data also shows that during this period, the biggest proportion of cases involved

physical abuse (79%), followed by emotional/psychological abuse (18.5%) and sexual

abuse (2.4%).  During this period, all types of abuse have illustrated an increase (Kaili &

Pavlou, 2010).  Additionally, statistical records collected by SPAVO add to this trend as

they illustrate that DA cases tripled during 2004 to 2009, 397 cases in 2004 compared to

1148 cases in 2009 (Kaili & Pavlou, 2010).  In terms of gender, these statistics show that

the large majority of victims in 2009 were women (83%) compared to men (8.6%).  In

contrast to the statistics gathered by the police, SPAVO's data illustrate that during the

2004 to 2009 period, 82% of the cases involved emotional/psychological abuse, 44%

were physical in nature and 0.7% involved sexual abuse.  The data highlight an overlap in

types of abuse meaning that many cases involved both psychological and physical abuse

(Kaili & Pavlou, 2010).

Interestingly and more importantly, recent statistics presented by the Cypriot police

have shown that in 2016, 821 cases of DA were reported compared to 949 in 2015, 893

in 2014, 796 in 2013 and 760 in 2012 (Polykarpou, 2017).  From these 821 cases in 2016,

506 involved physical abuse whereas 280 psychological abuse and 35 sexual abuse.  This

trend is mostly in line with the statistics reported by the police for the period of 2002 to

2008.  According to these recent statistics, the cases involving female victims during the

five-year period of 2012-2016 are 3.387 (63,6%) and 514 in 2016 compared to 1.039

(19,5%) cases involving male victims during the five-year period and 192 in 2016

(Polykarpou, 2017).  The statistics also illustrated that the vast majority of perpetrators

over the 2012-2016 period were men (3.919 or 76,8% and 620 in 2016) however, over

this period, 1.112 (21.8% and 212 in 2016) women were reported for perpetrating DA

against their male partners (Polykarpou, 2017).  Although the statistics and data

presented above for the victim gender prevalence and general trends of DA in Cyprus

show that the large majority of victims of DA in the country are women, they also crucially illustrate that men can also be victims of female-perpetrated DA and that, as time goes by, the reported cases of male victimisation increase dramatically. Finally, as noted above, it is important to consider these statistics with caution as male victimisation in Cyprus might be underreported and many cases might not come to light due to issues discussed previously in the literature review such as the stigma surrounding the matter and the feelings of humiliation, embarrassment and shame that male victims might experience when contemplating if they should voice their stories.

### 1.8. The present study

Although initial understanding of the experience of male victimisation has been offered by pioneering studies, there is still ambiguity about this issue and it needs to be further investigated (Randle & Graham, 2011). Additionally, little is known about the cultural aspects of male victimisation (Randle & Graham, 2011), which is an important topic in need of further exploration as the experiences and meanings of abuse might differ given the culture of the victim (Jewkes, 2002; Mann & Takyi, 2009). Although studies on male victimisation have been conducted in a number of different countries, e.g. UK (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Esquivel-Santovēna & Dixon, 2012; Gadd et al., 2003a etc.), United States (Douglas & Hines, 2011; Durfee, 2011; Migliaccio, 2002; Tsui et al., 2010 etc.), Portugal (Carmo et al., 2011), Canada (Zverina et al., 2011) and Holland (Drijber et al., 2013), with male victims of different cultures, none of these studies have taken into consideration nor explored the cultural side of female-perpetrated male victimisation.

Researchers that have explored male victimisation, stress the importance of conducting further research on this issue in order to increase the understanding and promote awareness of female-perpetrated male victimisation (Hines et al., 2007). More

specifically, studies that investigate the impact of masculine identities on how male victims interpret their experiences (Randle & Graham, 2011), male victims' support networks (Tsui et al., 2010) and the perceptions as well as experiences of seeking support as a result of their victimisation (Hines & Douglas, 2010a; Tsui et al., 2010) are needed.  Additionally, men's experiences of psychological abuse (Douglas & Hines, 2011) and the impacts of DA on the emotional wellbeing of male victims should also be explored (Hines & Saudino, 2003) due to the fact that the impacts of male victimisation continue to be under-researched (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). Future research should also investigate the reasons why some male victims of DV choose to stay in the violent relationship (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001).

By taking into consideration the above, this research endeavours to explore the male participants' experiences of female-perpetrated DA, including how they made sense of their experiences, how the abuse impacted their physical and psychological wellbeing, what barriers they faced when seeking support, their experiences of receiving support and their descriptions of the severity and nature of the violence they experienced. Furthermore, another aim of this study was to specifically bring in the cultural aspect of DA victimisation, given that the participants were of a particular cultural background, in order to explore and address the limited understanding of the potential influences and differences in culture when it comes to DV male victimisation.

### *1.8.1. Implications for counselling psychology and professionals working with abused men*

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been found to be a major concern amongst male victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) who are looking for help (Hines & Douglas, 2011).  Hines and Douglas (2011) stressed that researchers and therapists

should understand the fact that both females and males can be victims of DA, and should also have knowledge of the existence and of the needs of male victims.

As mentioned earlier, a lot of work has been done on female victimisation and as a result, there is a large amount of knowledge, usable information and a clear understanding of the subject that practitioners can integrate into the therapeutic relationship (Hogan, Hegarty, Ward & Dodd, 2012). In spite of this, the phenomenon of male victimisation has been under researched and thus, as Hogan et al. (2012) state: "has not influenced theory and practice of working with DA" (p.45).

In a study by Cook (2009), it was found that the therapeutic community has overcome to some extent the taboos around male victimisation but, until very recently, therapists' responses to this subject were of denial and also, a negative attitude was held by therapists in training courses towards men that have been abused by their partners (Sarantakos, 1999). Moreover, it has been identified that stereotypes and gender identities which are culturally held have an impact on narrowing the beliefs people hold of men, thus constricting practitioners' capacities to work more effectively with victims of both genders (Macchietto, 1992).

Research also indicated that practitioners working with DA faced challenges in their views of gender, power and control as well as challenges with their world-view (Iliffe, 2000). Again, these results were based on research conducted with female victims of DV. Consequently, as Adams and Freeman (2002) propose there should be more research conducted, more professional training to be undertaken as well as setting-up treatment and prevention programs in order to help practitioners in working effectively with male victims of DA as well as female.

**Part 2: Methodology**

This research engaged in a qualitative inquiry in order to explore the lived experiences of male victims of female-perpetrated DV. The research required participants to engage in semi-structured interviews of up to an hour (Rabionet, 2011).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was considered the most appropriate methodological approach as, the aim of the research was to conceptualize the participants' experiences by allowing as much flexibility as possible whilst describing in as much detail (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

*2.1 Research Design – Qualitative versus Quantitative*

There has been a shift in psychological research in the past decade, in which qualitative inquiry has been regularly used instead of an almost sole use of empirical research methodologies of quantitative inquiry (Maya, 2009). As Maya (2009) argues, qualitative research methods aim to understand the participants' lived experience thus rejecting hypothesis testing. Therefore, the author explains that qualitative research methods are useful when the topic of inquiry is novel or under-researched and complex, as there is a possibility of obtaining unexpected results instead of having a predicted outcome that is often the case in quantitative inquiry. Qualitative approaches aim to provide rich descriptions of a particular phenomenon whereas, quantitative approaches aim to count volumes or occurrences (Smith & Dunworth, 2003). As a result, qualitative approaches have various desirable features that are not important aspects of quantitative approaches (Yardley, 2000).

According to Elliot and Timulak (2005), qualitative approaches have a number of advantages that firstly include, descriptions that are constantly emerging and unlimited

and secondly, the use of exploratory and open questions.  Thus, as the authors note, qualitative approaches bring up opportunities of discovering new phenomena or conditions.  Furthermore, qualitative approaches pay attention to features such as culture, meaning, interpersonal issues and context (Maya, 2009).  Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) note that researchers must chose a method of inquiry that has the capacity to provide useful and meaningful answers to the research questions that motivated their research. Therefore, by having the above in mind, it was felt that engaging with a qualitative design would be most appropriate for this research as it offers the opportunity to access meanings, interpretations and perspectives whilst continuing to be sensitive to every type of diversity (Willig, 2013).  Furthermore, as Langdridge (2007) argues, qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate methodology for research that aims to interpret and describe the meaning that phenomena have for the person experiencing them, echoing the research question and the aims of the current study.

## *2.2 Methodological approach*

A wide range of approaches exists in doing qualitative research.  A number of approaches include discourse analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), grounded theory and many more.  These qualitative approaches have a number of commonalities, as their main focus is to deepen our knowledge of a specific phenomenon (Elliot et al., 1999).  Nevertheless, as Elliot et al. (1999) explain, these approaches have developed their own methodological and theoretical methods.  Shaw (2001) advises researchers to consider carefully various significant questions before selecting a qualitative approach for their study; for example, what the researcher wants to find out about the particular topic and what data collection method will be required.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was deemed most appropriate for the aims

of this research.  IPA was developed by Jonathan Smith and his colleagues in the 1990s

(Smith, 1996) and, rather than being just a method of analysis, it is a methodology in

that, it is an approach to qualitative research in psychology (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In

particular, IPA is an attempt to restore human agency thus, subjectivity to qualitative

analysis given that it was developed as a reaction to the discursive approaches that

influenced qualitative research at the time, and that aimed to look at discourse and text

rather than focusing on the people behind the text (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005).  In

other words, IPA is an attempt to take the attention back to the people producing the

text and to focus on lived experience (Reid et al., 2005).

The epistemological underpinnings of IPA lie with phenomenology, a branch of

philosophical thinking (Smith et al., 2009).  Phenomenology is about how the world is

experienced by people within particular time periods and contexts (Willig, 2013).  This

philosophical standpoint posits that, oneself and the world are not separate from one's

meanings of the two (Zahavi & Simionescu-Panait, 2014).  The founders of IPA defined it

as an approach that employs a process of interpretative involvement within transcripts

and texts in order to unfold the meanings contained in peoples' stories (Smith, 2011).

One of the reasons why IPA has become hugely popular in practitioner disciplines is that

it has a model of the person that resonates with how we think about people in

counselling and psychotherapy (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Therefore, the basic

assumption behind it is that people are self-interpretive beings as we have experiences

of the world and we make sense of these experiences by reflecting on them (Smith et

al., 2009).  More particularly, IPA views people as actively engaged and interpreting the

objects, people and events that take place in their lives and this, is viewed as sense-

making (Smith, Jarman & Osbourne, 1999).  The phenomenological aspect of IPA is centered on understanding peoples' lived experiences and the meanings people attach to their experiences so the focus of IPA is on how people make sense of the world and 'reality' as it appears to and is made meaningful to the individual (Shaw, 2001).  The interpretive aspect of IPA is underpinned by a hermeneutic philosophy and the assumption that researchers can't access participants' worlds directly as we are all interpretive beings and researchers have to make sense of participants' experiences using their own interpretive resources (Smith et al., 2009).  Therefore, IPA can be viewed as a dual interpretive process, also known as the double hermeneutic process, in which participants are trying to make sense of their world and researchers are trying to make sense of the participants' sense making (Braun & Clarke, 2013).  In this process, researchers are required to interpret and bring their own beliefs and assumptions. Therefore, the researcher is assuming an insider perspective (Willig, 2013) which, according to Braun and Clarke (2013), is never completely possible because access to participants' experiences depends on the researcher's own perceptions. This is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher which can be viewed both as descriptive, because it endeavors to describe how phenomena appear, but it is also interpretive because there is an acknowledgement that there is no such thing as a phenomenon which is not interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

IPA also aims to be idiographic as it has a concern for the particular and it aims to produce a detailed, in-depth analysis and an understanding of how particular experiential phenomena have been understood from the perspective of the particular people in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009).  In other words, there is a balance between the focus on the particular lived experiences of individual participants and a focus on patterning (Smith et al., 2009).  As an idiographic methodology, IPA is very

much in line with the philosophy and practice of counseling psychology, which emphasizes beliefs, meanings and context that are constructed both between and within people and impact their wellbeing (BPS, 2005).

Given that this method is focused on personal meaning and sense making in a particular context for people who share a particular experience, the questions are open and inductive which allows exploring, investigating and eliciting (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, IPA uses purposive sampling in which researchers try to identify people with particular characteristics who can tell them something about the topic that they are interested in (Smith et al., 2009). IPA then utilizes a number of tasks that allows the identification and integration of different themes that are then clustered within and between participants' transcripts (Smith, 2011).

## 2.3  Rationale for chosen approach

IPA is thought to have certain advantages in terms of the exploration of how individuals find meaning in or make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2011). Initially, when thinking about the qualitative approach most suitable for this study, thematic analysis (TA) was considered instead of IPA due to a familiarity with the method. However, after carefully considering different aspects such as the type of research question explored, the sample, the theoretical framework and the philosophical paradigm underpinning the study, TA was rejected. A TA and IPA study can seem very similar at times; however, these two approaches have a number of divergences between them (Maya, 2009). To name some of these differences very simply: firstly, TA is a method for the collection and analysis of data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). On the other hand, IPA is an approach that is theoretically informed thus, one can think of it as a methodology (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Secondly, TA and IPA follow a different procedure (Maya, 2009). Thirdly,

TA is flexible around different features such as epistemological and ontological underpinnings in that it can be utilized for studies across this spectrum whereas an IPA study is specific to the underpinnings of contextualism and critical realism (Larkin et al., 2006). Also, TA is flexible in that different theoretical frameworks underpin this method including phenomenology, whereas a phenomenological theoretical framework solely informs IPA (Larkin, et al., 2006). Phenomenology will be the theoretical framework that will inform this research. Fourthly, a number of research questions can be addressed with TA (Braun and Clarke, 2013). However, with IPA participants are asked about their perspectives and experiences, which is in line with the research question at hand as the study is about Cypriot males' experiences of DV. Finally, TA doesn't require specific sampling, as it doesn't share the focus on idiographic as IPA (Braun and Clarke, 2013). As this research focuses on the particular features of the participants as well as the patterns across participants, IPA's sampling method of a small sample size that is homogenous was ideal.

As mentioned previously, the strongest argument for using IPA is that it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and how these individuals understand them (Smith et al., 2009). Due to very limited research on the topic especially considering the cultural aspect of it, I am interested, as a researcher, in Cypriot men's accounts of abuse and in empowering the participants to share their stories.

## 2.4 Method

### 2.4.1 Participants and sampling

Six Cypriot men who have experiences of DA were recruited for this study through the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO), which is based in Nicosia, Cyprus. The organisation was approached as soon as the study was

registered and was keen to support with participant recruitment. The chosen number of participants is due to the fact that, as an idiographic approach, the emphasis is on the particular characteristics of each participant but also, on any patterns that might emerge across participants, so it's advisable that the sample size is small (Maya, 2009). Smith and Osborn (2007) further explain that IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes given that the detailed case-by-case analysis of individual transcripts takes a long time, and the aim of a study using IPA is to say something in detail about the understandings and perceptions of the participants rather than making more general claims.

Smith et al. (2011), specifically state that doctoral projects using IPA should seek to have between six to ten participants, making the number of participants of this doctoral project an appropriate sample size. The authors suggest that less than three transcripts may not produce sufficient differences or similarities in the data in order to generate meaningful themes whereas too many transcripts may lead to overwhelming amounts of data for the researcher. Furthermore, they caution researchers to not perceive higher numbers as an indication of better or more thorough work and therefore, they argue that, given the fundamental purpose of IPA of producing detailed accounts of participants' experiences, researchers should choose quality instead of quantity. It is believed that the sample size chosen for this research is appropriate in order to generate in-depth and meaningful data that is sufficient in addressing the research questions.

### 2.4.2 Inclusion criteria

As the crucial aspects of the investigation were the experiences of Cypriot male victims of DV, participants had to be male and of Cypriot nationality living in Cyprus. Furthermore, given that the study concentrated on male victims of abuse that was perpetrated by their female partners, the participants must have been heterosexual and suffered abuse by their female partners. Participants must also have been fluent in

English, i.e. able to communicate in and understand English, although at times, when there was a phrase and/or word they weren't able to communicate in English they could communicate it in Greek and then, the researcher would carefully translate it in English in order to portray an accurate representation of the segment.  Finally, participants must have been able to understand the aims of the research.

### *2.4.3 Data Collection Methods*

Various methods exist for data collection some of which include literature search, interviews, observations etc. (Silverman, 2006).  When considering the most appropriate data collection method, it was important to remember that the aim was to collect data directly from the participants thus, resulting in the choice of conducting interviews.  As McLeod (2003) explains, during an interview, the information that is being shared is closely examined due to the fact that the interviewer is present and this helps the researcher to check out his/her understanding.  According to McLeod (1999) there are a number of methods to conduct interviews that include unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews. In this study, the data was gathered using semi-structured interviews.  This decision was made based on McLeod's (1999) statement, who mentioned that semi-structured interviews are very effective when the person who is conducting the research has the ability to foresee the subject he or she plans to enquire.  This statement influenced my choice because I already knew my topic of interest and more or less, the data I was looking for. At the same time though, I also hoped for some data that was different to the data I was expecting.

Howitt and Cramer (2008) argue that one of the strengths of using semi-structured interviews is that they are flexible allowing participants to describe their experiences and feelings more freely without being controlled.  They also add that these interviews

give the researcher the opportunity to be alongside the participant in the here and now, resulting in the obtainment of data that are more specific, thorough, and rich. Moreover, Smith (2007) argues that another advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that the researcher can ask additional questions, which are not on the interview schedule, in reply to the answers a participant might give.

At this point, I would like to clarify that although I share the same native language with the participants (i.e. Greek) of this research, the six interviews were conducted in English. This decision was based on a number of reasons and mainly due to my previous experience of conducting semi-structured interviews in Greek. Firstly, I was aware that this study would be shared in a largely English examination with a largely English speaking and reading audience so, as with my previous experience of conducting interviews in another language, this would mean that the interviews would have been conducted in Greek and then, carefully translated to ensure accurate representation of the participants' stories. Therefore, this process would be excessively time consuming and, due to time constraints, I decided against this. Furthermore, from my previous experience, I frequently found that it was very difficult, almost impossible, to accurately translate and portray the exact meaning of what the participants were reporting given the differences in languages of various phrases, words and sentences. Kariotaki (2013) argues that, by conducting the interviews in the participants' native language, the unnecessary translation and hence, transformation of the data is avoided and participants' stories are accurately represented. However, having done both Greek and English interviews and given that the participants are fluent in the language that the interview is conducted in (see inclusion criteria above), I believe that participants' experiences were more accurately represented when the interview was conducted in English as they expressed exactly what they aimed to express and the potential pitfall of

getting lost in translation and thus, transforming the data into a non-accurate representation of their stories was avoided.  Importantly, this was the most robust argument for choosing to conduct the interviews in English.

### 2.4.4 Materials

The interview questions were developed based on questions that were asked in previous research that involved victims of DV (Hogan, 2016) and also, on some questions asked in a DV screening tool/protocol ("Client Screening", 2013).  The interviews were approximately thirty to forty five minutes each.  The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions and prompts to produce relevant data and some examples of the interview questions that were asked included: "How long have you attended the service?", "What made you come forward for help?", "What is your understanding of the difficulties in your relationship and why they occurred?", "What do you believe are the perceptions Cypriots have on male victimisation?" (see appendices for full interview schedule).  In order to help participants to open-up and feel at ease, the questions that were considered as less challenging were asked at the beginning of the interviews.

### 2.4.5 Procedure

Participants were first approached by the organisation that shared my interest in conducting this research and that I am looking for participants. Once the participants were approached by the organisation, I sent them the information sheet so that they would have time to read about the study, understand the study and have time to discuss if they wished with friends/family before I phoned them. Then, participants and I had a telephone conversation in which I shared information about the study, answered any questions they had and arranged the interview dates when they agreed that they would like to participate in the study. After arranging this, I met with each of my participants to

conduct the interviews. I presented them again with the participant consent form and the information sheet (both found in appendices) so that I could go over it again and confirm that they understood what the study and interviews included. Finally, I asked the participants if they are still willing to take part in the study and confirmed that they consented to participate.  After the participants signed, I turned on the recorder and started the interview.

## 2.5 Analysis

Regarding analysis in IPA, researchers hold an important role as they make meaning of the data they gathered by having an interpretive relationship with their transcripts (Maya, 2009).  Therefore, this involves the careful reading and re-reading of the transcripts (Smith et al., 1999).  Smith and Osborne (2003) argue that by doing this, researchers start to gain an insight into their participants' experiences and identify any meanings by arranging the transcript into 'meaning units'.  Analysis begins with a process whereby researchers comment on their early analytic observations about each data section; this process is known as 'initial commenting' (Maya, 2009).  During this process, researchers note any observations, reflections and thoughts that come about while reading the text (Smith et al., 2009).  The coding process in IPA starts by coding the first data section and then goes on to developing themes for the certain data section (Maya, 2009).  IPA has two types of codes that are referred to as 'conceptual' and 'descriptive'.  Moreover, Smith et al. (2009) explain that IPA consists of two levels of theme development that are known as 'superordinate' and 'subordinate/emergent themes'.  The authors add that superordinate themes across the gathered data come about after the coding and the development of the emergent themes for each data section.

More specifically, the analysis of the data followed the protocol proposed by Smith et al. (2009) and was as follows:

(1.) Firstly engaging with one of the transcripts in detail in order to initiate an idiographic approach that in turn, helped in identifying categorizations and examples.

(2.) Familiarity of the data was gained by reading transcripts multiple times. Comments and notes were made regarding significant interpretations, associations and language; all the comments were recorded next to the corresponding data extracts.

(3.) Once comments were completed for the entire transcript, documentation of possible emergent themes was made in a separate notebook with corresponding line numbers. This process aimed to capture any significant qualities found in the set of data and was done without any selection or exclusion of particular extracts.

(4.) An exploration of thematic connections across sets of data was carried out that allowed a theoretical analytical ordering to happen. This process has been described as 'clustering' (Smith et al., 1997).

(5.) Participants' understandings were captured in a table of themes that was developed; superordinate themes were identified and consisted of the labeled clusters. A number of themes were excluded, at this point, on the basis that they were not believed to be of a good fit with the structure that was emerging or if they were not adequately supported from the participant's extracts.

(6.) A final table that consisted of superordinate and subordinate themes was developed that was later forwarded for scrutiny by the team of supervisors.

(7.) Upon agreement of the final table with the supervisory team, both superordinate and subordinate themes were converted into a narrative explanation. Examples and explanations of these themes utilizing excerpts from the data were developed and at the same time, clarity between researcher's interpretations and participants' statements was ensured.

Finally, throughout the entire process, a research journal was kept, that assisted in noting ideas relating to the research process and in reflecting.

## 2.6 Quality in qualitative research

Generally, the process of assessing quality in research using qualitative approaches has been a controversial matter. This process has been mostly compared to measures of quantitative research such as validity and reliability. Smith et al. (2009) explain that, due to the nature of qualitative inquiry, these measures may not be relevant to the approach so, the authors propose that different criteria should be in place in order to evaluate quality in qualitative research.

For the purposes of this, Yardley (2000) emphasized four general areas to pay attention to and that include maintaining sensitivity to how the researcher stays mindful of the data collection and interaction within the interviews or to context within the research process. Sensitivity to the needs of participants was maintained throughout the research process as the researcher has experience in counseling and in working with a wide range of presenting issues. Furthermore, Yardley (2000) noted that the researcher establishes quality within the research process by demonstrating rigor and commitment. In this study, this was demonstrated through the thoroughness of the research interviews by using therapeutic skills in order to prompt information from the six participants but also, through sampling and recruitment. Therapeutic skills also aided in

identifying when to turn away from any material that may have caused uncomfortable levels of distress to the participants.  Adding to the above criteria, Yardley (2000) highlights the importance of being coherent and transparent during the write-up phase of the research.  In the present research, this was accomplished by the detailed and coherent description of the research process that included accounts of the steps that took place in the analysis, the sampling methods employed and how the interview questions were developed.   Moreover, the author emphasizes that the ultimate validity test in qualitative research is whether the findings are of importance or have an impact on the field of inquiry.  The primary purpose of this study will be achieved in the case that it will inform readers of anything that is useful, interesting or important.  The most significant aspect of this research is that it has made the issue of male victimisation visible and has given the platform for male victims to come forward and raise their voices regarding their experience of DA, especially in countries like Cyprus.

## *2.7 Ethical Considerations*

The main ethical consideration I had to have in mind was maintaining the wellbeing of my participants during the time of the interview and the study. As Bond (2004; p.5) states: "Before undertaking any kind of research, the researcher should consult someone who is independent of the research and competent to identify both any potential risks to participants and also whether these have been adequately taken into account in the research design". To ensure this, before I started with my interviews I submitted an ethics form with my study's intentions and how I would manage risk to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, at the University of the West of England (UWE), for which I gained ethical approval. In addition, I also informed my dissertation supervisory team of my intentions.  Furthermore, the study was carried out following the Code of Human Research Ethics proposed by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2014).

The next steps I took to ensure that I was conducting my research ethically included: a) Presenting my participants with an information sheet that included the details of my research as well as a consent form which was obtained prior to the day of interviewing but also, on the day I conducted the interviews. b) I provided my participants with the contact details of registered therapists with the Pancyprian Psychological Society as well as information on local support organisations and SPAVO who were keen to support my research. Adding to this, I also gave them the contact information of my dissertation supervisor in the possibility that they had any concerns regarding my study or me as a researcher. c) My participants were also informed that they will be able to withdraw from the study up until the first submission time period, which was March - May 2017. I explained that this was because at that point, the data would have been written-up into a report and formally submitted to UWE to be examined. d) The participants were informed of the fact that the interview was being recorded and that after that, it would be transcribed but that their names and any identifying information would not be recorded in order to maintain anonymity. Moreover, they were informed that, transcripts and recordings (electronic forms) would be kept in encrypted files on a password-protected laptop that I only have access to. Also, that the transcripts, recordings and laptop would also be kept in a locked cabinet at my home. Finally, they were also told that the encrypted data would be deleted up to 3 years after the final submission for the purpose of further publications or papers I might want to write.

## 2.8 Reflexivity Statement

Having the ability to step back from our cultural identity and personal standpoint is of great importance in qualitative research as it allows the researcher to critically reflect on assumptions and common values that form the research project (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

As a single, white heterosexual female from Cyprus, I shared a number of characteristics with the research participants, one being sexual orientation as well as ethnic group and cultural background. I also had a number of different characteristics including gender, age (17 year difference with mean age of the participants – 42) and the fact that I am someone who is childless and hasn't been in a violent relationship. It has been suggested that such social factors (e.g. age, gender, culture, ethnicity etc.) should be taken into consideration when conducting research, as they are characteristics that may have an impact on different stages of the project (Manderson, Bennett & Andajani, 2006). Therefore, a reflective journal was kept throughout the entire research process that aided me in reflecting on the possible influences of my personal assumptions and/or social characteristics on the project.

The first log in my reflective journal was about my incentives of conducting this research topic and my interests in the subject. As a counseling psychologist in training, I have worked with some female victims of abuse and I was always interested in their experiences and what the impacts of this experience were but also, what barriers they faced when leaving the relationship or when seeking support. During my training however, I had never come across male victims of abuse so I had never considered the matter until I came across a British television program in which a male victim of DV was talking about his experience. Instantly, while watching the show, my interest was heightened and I had a number of questions including whether men can be victims of DV, how can this happen to men and more specifically, as a Cypriot, whether there are any Cypriot men that are victims of abuse and if yes, given the culture, what are their experiences and what Cypriot perceptions are on the matter. I can't hide that one of my initial reactions to the show was to question the practicality of male victimisation and this, along with the questions mentioned above, are very frequently reported in

research concerning male victimisation as the reactions of society (e.g. Hines & Douglas, 2010a; Saunders, 2002 etc.). The show was the starting point in my exploration on the matter and the reason behind the choice of topic for this research project.

Furthermore, it was important for me to take into consideration, in my reflective journal, that my cultural background was an influencing aspect in this study. Firstly, because of my assumptions of the Cypriot culture in relation to the topic. More specifically, my log of assumptions included considerations regarding the somewhat still patriarchal views that the Cypriot culture holds, their views on gender identities/roles and masculinity, their possible judgments about male victimisation as well as perceptions the culture has about seeking support. Secondly, I believe that my cultural background was an influencing aspect because it allowed me to explore a topic that has never been investigated before in the country. This, in my opinion, might have been difficult for other researchers that do not share the same culture with the participants as they wouldn't have a shared understanding of the culture and possibly, the participants might have found it difficult to share their experiences with a researcher that is not of the same culture. Most importantly, the shared understanding of the culture enabled me to understand the cultural part of the participants' experiences of victimisation and to identify and manage any issues or obstacles that might have arose. It was very important and an advantage to acknowledge, have in mind and log throughout the research process the influence of all of the above, i.e. prior knowledge and assumptions, that unavoidably impacted the analysis and writing up of the dissertation. Keeping a reflective journal and being in contact with the supervisory team was also helpful in challenging potential assumptions and beliefs I brought to the research. I believe that this permitted the study to progress and be open to different ideas and ways of thinking as well as to develop fresh understandings, insights and views.

Another aspect that I thoroughly reflected upon in my reflective journal was the difference in gender between the participants and myself but also, that their abusive partners shared the same gender as me.  I carefully considered whether this had an influence on their responses and hence, on the findings of this research.  However, given that all participants mentioned at the end of their interviews that they felt comfortable and relieved in sharing their stories and also expressed their interest in whether the study would be published in order to raise awareness led me to think that their interview and participation experience was positive.  Moreover, a review of literature on the matter revealed that male victims of abuse prefer to share their experiences with women as they anticipate greater compassion, acceptance and empathy (e.g. Bem, 1974; Myers, 1989).

Finally, evidence suggests that researchers may experience vicarious trauma when continuously exposed to traumatic and distressing text during the transcription, analysis and writing up phases of a study (Coles, Astbury, Dartnall and Limjerwala, 2014).  In order to limit this risk, various strategies were employed that included arranging consistent breaks into my schedule in order to facilitate self-care and also, being in personal therapy, which helped in managing my psychological wellbeing.

## Part 3. Findings and Discussion

The analytic process detailed three superordinate themes (see table 3a below). Namely, 'Failed Men' captured the experience of being a male victim of female-perpetrated DA mostly in terms of perceptions around male victimisation and fears of judgment. This superordinate theme included two subordinate themes: 'The man after the abuse' and 'Cultural experience of male victimisation'. 'Living with the abuse – Escapes from the abuse' was the second superordinate theme that described the lived experience of being a male victim of DV by considering two subthemes: 'Responsibility and reasons for the abuse' and 'The deceitful perpetrator – Progression and nature of the abuse'. Finally, 'Barriers to seeking support' was the third superordinate theme that captured the participants' lived experience of seeking and receiving support both in terms of professional support but also, support from loved ones. This theme included two subordinate themes: 'Positive and negative experiences of seeking support' and 'Coming forward for help'.

3a. Thematic table of superordinate and subordinate themes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Superordinate theme | **1. Failed Men – The experience of being a male victim** | |
| Subordinate themes | **1.1 The man after the abuse – Impact of abuse on masculinity and psychological wellbeing** | **1.2 The cultural experience of male victimisation** |
| Superordinate theme | **2. Living with the abuse and escapes from the abuse** | |
| Subordinate themes | **2.1 Responsibility and reasons for the abuse** | **2.2 The deceitful perpetrator – Progression and nature of the abuse** |
| Superordinate theme | **3. Barriers to seeking support** | |
| Subordinate themes | **3.1 Positive and negative experiences of seeking support** | **3.2 Coming forward for help (reasons behind)** |

**Superordinate theme 1. Failed Men – The experience of being a male victim. "Am I the only softie that his partner abused him?"**

The first superordinate theme addresses the instances in which the participants spoke about their experiences of being victims of DV in ways which related to their gender as male victims and to the perpetrators' genders as female. All of the participants brought up the subject of the existing perceptions on male victimisation by talking about the fact that men are perceived as the unlikely victims of DA, a finding often reflected in male victimisation research (Lambert, 2011). As Christophoros and Stavros say:

*"I thought that as soon as I would enter, the building everyone would be staring, looking at me and thinking, 'What is HE [emphasis] doing here? A man?'" (Christophoros)*

*"I feared that everyone would be judging me and making fun of me for being male and a victim of abuse from my wife because they wouldn't understand…I feared that the question these people would ask me would be if I did anything to her for her to do that back to me or to react in the way she reacted and that people would assume that because I am a man I must have done something to her before she did those things to me" (Stavros)*

Christophoros' and Stavros' accounts demonstrate that men are rarely perceived as victims of DV and because of this, and given their gender as victims, it seems that one of their main concerns and worries was that people would judge them and make fun of them. Stavros also pointed out two important matters in this extract. One being that because of his gender as a victim of DA, he was fearful that a number of people would question whether he behaved in a way that would result in his partner's abusive behaviour towards him as if they were suggesting either that he was the one that perpetrated the abuse first or that he asked for it because of something that he might have done. Stavros' concern appears to not be misplaced given evidence, which suggests that men are very frequently perceived by the public as the perpetrators of violence as masculinity traditionally involves males claiming their dominance over females (Lambert, 2011). Secondly, Stavros' fear of judgment for being a male victim of DV was exacerbated by the fact that the perpetrator of the abuse was female and that

this would be incomprehensible by other people (Lambert, 2011). In other words, that people would be judgmental because they can't understand how females could be abusive towards males. Panayiotis also mentioned that people are unaware of the fact that male victimisation can happen and he seemed fearful of the reaction of other people but especially, of other men who would probably question the practicality of male victimisation. This was a common concern amongst all participants. As Giorgos and Iakovos mention:

*"I am sure that the people there, at the time, hadn't seen anything like it, like me, a man abused by his wife at such an age" (Giorgos)*

*"Everyone will judge me and think to themselves that that guy is so huge from the gym and everything but yet his fiancé kicked his ass…and make fun of me…Because how weird is it when a muscly man walks in the service and says, my girlfriend beats me up, and if people there went on to make fun of me and discuss it with other people?" (Iakovos)*

There are a number of important issues to note in these brief accounts. Giorgos and Iakovos suggest that other contributing factors make the experience of being a male victim worse. For Giorgos, age was a characteristic that in his opinion might have added an even more negative element to people's judgments and reactions in that not only he was a male victim of DV but also, he was older than what people would expect a victim to be. On the other hand, for Iakovos, the contributing factor that would make judgments worse was his body type and his size. Echoing this, research has suggested that strength and physical size are very frequently reported as characteristics that come in the way of men's accounts of victimisation, given that these characteristics are strongly associated with masculinity (Migliaccio, 2001). Iakovos adds another important issue to what made the experience worse but also, to how male victims are perceived. He suggested that male victimisation is such a shocking and unlikely phenomenon that not only people of the service might make fun of him and his experience but also, that they might go on to gossip about him and make fun of him with other people.

Moreover, most participants including Andreas shared their fears of being the 'only abused man':

*"I didn't know what to expect from them, how they would react to my case if you want...'Will they make fun of me?' Or 'Am I the only man that goes to the service?' I mean they have seen other cases of DV but I was thinking 'was there another man or am I the only softie that his partner abused him?'" (Andreas)*

The above extract illustrates Andreas' concern that he might be the 'only abused man' in Cyprus and that possibly, people of the service won't understand and might make fun of him because they haven't experienced another male victim before. Evidence has highlighted that most male victims of female-perpetrated abuse, share the same fear as Andreas, of being the only man that has been abused by his female partner (Hogan, 2016). Furthermore, it seems that Andreas explains the fact that he might be the 'only abused man' by suggesting that there was something wrong with his way of being ("Am I the only softie...?") that caused the abuse or allowed it to continue. Simply put, it is as if he is suggesting that he might be the only man that was abused because no other man has a similar, 'faulty' way of being. This notion, that male victims of DA might be perceived as 'faulty', not 'real' men or 'failed' men as a result of their experience of DV, is evident in the above extracts and was shared by all the participants. Empirical evidence mirrors this finding as widely held societal notions posit that it's impossible for 'real' men to be victims of DA (Yarrow & Churchill, 2009).

In summary, this superordinate theme highlights many of the worries, fears and concerns that the participants had, especially around how they might be perceived as male victims of female-perpetrated DA. Additionally, it illustrates that others perceive male victimisation as highly unlikely and almost impossible suggesting that many people hold on to the notion that men cannot be victims of female-perpetrated DA and if faced with the reality of this, these people might judge male victims as 'faulty' or 'failed' men.

**Subordinate theme 1.1. The man after the abuse – Impact of abuse on masculinity and psychological wellbeing. "It made me doubt me as a man, myself and as a person"**

Given the physical and psychological impacts that DV can have on victims, it is not surprising that all participants described the psychological impacts of the abuse while, at the same time, they all specifically concentrated on the impacts the abuse had on their sense of masculinity.  Christophoros described how this experience made him question his sense of masculinity:

*"I started questioning my 'manliness', I mean don't get me wrong no one should accept such behaviour, but how can a man accept something like that, how can he accept that his wife was throwing objects at him, leaving bruises and marks, I feel stupid as a man, how did I permit this to happen? … It made me doubt me as a man, myself and as a person"*

In the above extract, Christophoros acknowledges that both women and men shouldn't be victims of abuse and shouldn't accept abusive behaviours but, he also seems to have emphasized and questioned numerous times the fact that he accepted and permitted such behaviours as a man.  This, as he mentions, made him question whether he is a 'true' man and whether his response, behaviour and gender characteristics are 'manly' enough so, in other words, he started questioning his masculinity and his gender identity as a result of the abuse.  Christophoros' account of the impacts of abuse on his sense of masculinity is consistent with other evidence on male victimisation as it has been suggested that abuse narratives are in contrast to masculine identities and position a male victim as weak and powerless (Corbally, 2015).  Therefore, as Corbally (2015) highlights, DA challenges male victims' gender role assumptions and hence, their sense of masculinity. In addition, it seems that Christophoros specifically concentrates on the physical abuse that he suffered, as if he wants to emphasize that this form of abuse is extremely rare towards men but also, that other men wouldn't have accepted nor permitted this kind of abuse towards them.  Christophoros' confusion regarding his female partner's use of physical violence is underpinned by the widely held notion that

men are more physically strong and powerful than women (Oliffe et al., 2014).

Christophoros also believes that he didn't act in a 'smart way' as a man in that, given the

masculine characteristics and roles he believes are 'manly', he shouldn't have permitted

such behaviour towards him in the first place so, in turn, he is left feeling as a not 'good

enough' man.  Similarly, Giorgos shares how the abuse made him feel less of a man:

*"I already felt less of a man; I didn't want someone else confirming it to me … The experience was really isolating …it made me feel different to other men after the experience but also when it started I caught myself comparing me and my 'manliness' with other men and it made me think how others would react if they were in a situation like mine. It really made me think of what it means to be a man and how we are seen by society, other people around us etc."*

In his account of what the impacts of being a male victim of DA are, Giorgos talks about

how the abuse negatively influenced and minimised his sense of 'manliness' or

masculinity.  For Giorgos, the slightest indication that someone else might perceive him

as 'less manly' or as a 'problematic man' would confirm the way he was already feeling

about his masculine identity and masculine role and this, in turn, would make the

psychological pain of the abuse much worse.  Migliaccio (2001) provides an explanation

to what Giorgos is experiencing in terms of the impacts of abuse on his masculinity as he

argues that, individuals come to internalize gender expectations that are imposed by

society and as a result of this, they develop their gender identities.  As the author then

explains, this process then frequently emphasizes what behaviours are acceptable and

unacceptable for both genders so men and women endeavor to adhere to their gender

roles that are expected by others.  Consequently, the label of being an abused man is a

gendered role that leads people to perceive the male victim as less masculine and in

turn, this impacts male victims' sense of masculinity (Migliaccio, 2001).  The participant

also talks about the isolation he felt during and after the experience as well as the fact

that he felt removed from the rest of the world.  The consequence of this for Giorgos

was that he started feeling different to people that shared the same gender as him and

almost alienated and inferior to other men.  It appears that Giorgos felt marginalized

due to his victimisation experience, an issue often reported by other male victims of DV

(Migliaccio, 2001).  Giorgos goes on to mention that the experience of being a male

victim of DV led him to compare himself and his masculinity numerous times to other

men.  At the same time, he also questioned his reactions and the actions that he took

whilst experiencing the violence to the perceived reactions of other men as if to ask

himself, "how would 'true' and 'good enough' men react to the experience and what

would they have done about it?" The confidence and self-esteem of male victims

frequently declines due to the experience of abuse (Lambert, 2011) and as a result, they

may compare themselves to other men so this may further damage their sense of

masculinity and intensify social isolation (Morgan & Wells, 2016).  In line with this, it

seems that these comparisons and questions that Giorgos was thinking about, made him

feel less of a man and made him question in general how society perceives men and

their gender roles and characteristics.  In essence, Giorgos talks about how the

experience of being a male victim of abuse makes a man question his masculinity and

how this 'messes' with the gender identities and roles one holds.  Likewise, in the below

extract, Andreas also highlights that the experience of the abuse made him question

numerous notions he held and took for granted about gender identities and more

specifically, about what it is to be a man and what a man's role is in society:

*"I felt like rubbish not only as a man…it made me question…a lot of the views I had about being a man and what that means but it also made me feel rubbish as a human being, it was so demeaning. You know when you are a man you perceive the world differently than when you are a woman…we learn about ourselves and how we are in different ways…so everything I learnt about men went into question after this experience and as a human…it made me wonder 'how are people even capable of things like this'"*

Andreas also stressed the differences in how men and women are brought up and how

this shapes the perceptions that men and women have about their gender roles and

characteristics and, as he says, the perceptions he held about his gender and role went

into question after the experience of DV (Migliaccio, 2001). Moreover, Andreas adds that the experience of abuse was really degrading and that, both as a man and as a human being, he felt like he had no value to the point that he felt like garbage. This degrading feeling and generally, the negative impacts of abuse on the sense of self and the sense of one's worth have also been frequently reported by female victims of abuse (Reed & Enright, 2006). The consequences of this, as Andreas explains, were that he started questioning masculine identities and roles and in turn, his own masculinity but also, how abuse perpetrators are able to behave in such an inhumane way to other people and, the reason to why they do so.

Similar to Giorgos and Andreas, Panayiotis also spoke about how the abuse made him question and doubt all the perceptions he held regarding his masculinity, his role, himself as a person and also, humanity in general:

*"I felt that I betrayed men and like I wasn't a man basically…it was very difficult; it made me doubt myself as a father, a husband and as a man…it made me feel so useless, like I had no purpose in life, it was really disabling, I felt like I was trapped and that I couldn't react or more correctly that I didn't know how to react to it, it was so alien to me…It actually makes you doubt everything you know, yourself, humanity, how can someone be so cruel to someone they are supposed to love?…it was really damaging and made me think a lot and doubt a lot about what I know"*

For Panayiotis, the experience of abuse seemed to have made him question and doubt everything he knew, his whole reality. Mirroring Andreas' reflection on abuse perpetrators, Panayiotis also questioned how people are able to treat others in such a way but by specifically concentrating on the concept of love. As a result of the abuse, it seems that Panayiotis questioned everything he knew about love as he has been trying to work out how his wife, who claimed that she loved him, could have behaved in such a cruel way towards him that resulted in him feeling damaged, useless and of no worth. Drawing on the romantic narratives of love, Corbally (2015) suggested that, love was a significant concept to defending a lot of male victims' decisions to get married to their

partners, commit to their relationships and to potentially endure the violence they experience in order to fulfill their promise to their partners as the masculine expectation of honor suggests. Therefore, it is likely that Panayiotis is confused about why his partner behaved abusively against him given her claim of love and he may have been left distraught, as he was willing to honor the masculine expectation of being loyal.

Additionally, in his account of the impacts of DA, Panayiotis also spoke about how the experience of being a male victim left him feeling less of a man. He talks about the impact of the abuse on his sense of masculinity in a manner that conveys that the experience had been so damaging to the point that he felt that he betrayed male nature and couldn't relate with the label of being a 'true' man after it, a finding often reported by other male victims of DV (Corbally, 2015; Hogan, 2016). The participant's feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are also evident as he characterizes the abuse as disabling due to the fact that he didn't know how to react to it and thus, he felt almost paralyzed in the abusive relationship. Another important aspect to note from Panayiotis' account is that, apart from doubting himself as a man and a husband as a result of the violence, he also mentions that the abuse made him doubt himself as a father. Interestingly, this was something that Giorgos, who is also a father, brought up in his interview as well by reporting that the violence not only interfered with his masculine identity but also, with other identities such as the sacred identity of being a dad that in turn made the experience of abuse even more difficult for both Panayiotis and Giorgos. Research has suggested that the experience of DV very often impacts the identity of being a father and when this happens, male victims are 'stripped' of their sense of masculinity (Fenstermaker & West, 2002) given that male victims believe that they haven't met the masculine expectations of being a 'good dad' (Corbally, 2015).

Adding to the above accounts of the impacts of DV on the participants' sense of masculinity, Iakovos and Stavros also described how the abuse impacted their sense of masculinity. Both their accounts echoed what the other four participants described in terms of the impacts of abuse on masculine identities in that all participants felt like 'problematic' or 'faulty' men and that they were left with doubts regarding their gender roles as well as a minimised sense of masculinity.

Impacts of abuse on psychological wellbeing

All the participants that took part in this study described how the abuse impacted their emotional wellbeing. When describing the impacts of DV, Christophoros explains that the psychological impacts caused more pain and were more difficult to work with compared to the bruises and physical pain of the abuse: *"The most difficult part, not the physical pain and marks but the psychological pain I felt and had to work through"*. Reflecting this, female victims of DA frequently explain than the emotional effects of abuse are more complex than the physical ones as they lead victims to challenge their saneness (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Similarly, Panayiotis reported that the psychological impacts of the abuse last longer and his account highlighted the continuing chaos of these consequences and that emotional effects continue for a long period of time after the abusive relationship ends; a finding also frequently reported by female victims (Barnes, 2013).

Amongst the psychological impacts of the violence, almost all participants reported that they felt embarrassed and ashamed both during and after the abuse. This finding is in line with numerous studies on male victimisation that emphasize the embarrassment and shame male victims report as a result of their victimisation (Jocelyn, 2011). Andreas described feeling embarrassed about the experience and ashamed about the way he

was treated by his partner, especially when the abuse became physical: *"It was extremely embarrassing…I felt so ashamed of what she did or what she said but also about the fact that towards the end she started hitting me"*. Panayiotis talks about this in a way that portrays a picture of him walking on eggshells and which also reflects his feelings of embarrassment and shame to the point that he felt naked and vulnerable for everyone to make fun of: *"I felt so embarrassed it was like I was barefoot or naked and walking on glass. I also felt so much shame and especially when I think of my daughter that she had such a dad as a role model, someone that couldn't defend himself against his own wife"*. For Panayiotis, a lot of the embarrassment and shame he felt also links to the impacts of the abuse on his identity of being a dad and his perception of being a bad role model for his daughter given that he didn't defend himself and react to the abuse.

Similarly, Giorgos reflected on the shame he felt that also linked to being a father: *"It was very embarrassing, I felt ashamed of who I was as a person, as a male, as a partner and as a dad to a young man and it really made me think of my son and what would I have done if this happened to him, would I do nothing about it?"* For Giorgos, a lot of the embarrassment was linked to not putting an end to the abuse sooner and to the abusive behaviours he suffered at the hands of his female partner. The embarrassment and shame of being physically abused by his wife was so intense for Giorgos that he had to lie about the marks and bruises she had caused him. Christophoros also felt an intense feeling of shame about his experience of abuse and more specifically, about the visible signs of physical abuse to the extent that he wore certain clothes that would cover the bruises and in extreme cases, he took time off work: *"It was very shameful, I had to cover the bruises by wearing particular clothes or I had to take time off work when they were very bad"*. Giorgos' and Christophoros' accounts mirror various other studies in this area, which found that male victims often cover any physical wounds in an effort to hide their victimisation from others (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Oliffe et al., 2014).

The majority of participants also reported feeling anxious, low and depressed as a result of the abuse they suffered: *"I felt very low, stressed and anxious but also scared for my job, my personal life that I didn't have a personal life, I felt like I was drowning, that I couldn't breathe!" (Andreas).* *"I was either on edge or getting frustrated easily or felt very lonely and sad" (Iakovos).* For Stavros, these negative feelings resulted in suicidal ideation: *"I felt so low and depressed but also anxious as a result of everything I went through that, at some point, I wanted to end my life. I couldn't take it anymore living with these feelings it was unbearable".* The above detrimental emotional consequences have been frequently reported by other male victims of abuse (Randle & Graham, 2011).

Another important impact of the abuse on the participants' psychological wellbeing was that on their evaluation of themselves and their appreciation of their qualities after the abuse. Three participants reported that the abuse had an impact on their confidence and self-esteem: *"It messed with my mind and my confidence" (Panayiotis).* Andreas described how his self-esteem was impacted particularly when the abuse became physical: *"It also messed a lot with my self-esteem, especially when she got physically abusive".* Furthermore, for Iakovos, it seems that his confidence is specifically challenged when he thinks about how other men, who are strangers to him, would react to his story or what they would think of him as a male victim of female-perpetrated DA: *"I am faced with my low confidence and also the thoughts of what other men would say or react to it that don't know me".* These findings mirror research, which suggests that DV impacts negatively on the confidence and self-esteem of male victims (Lambert, 2011).

In addition to the psychological impacts that the participants described, one participant reported that the abuse changed his perception of future relationships and in turn,

women: *"I think that I wouldn't be able to trust any other woman, I know that not all women are like that…but I am so scared of going into another relationship after what happened to me" (Stavros)*.  Stavros' account echoes research findings of female victims of DV who report that they are scared to be in a future relationship after the traumatic experience of abuse (Barnes, 2013).  Stavros' account of the changes in his views of relationships and women as well as the accounts of the other participants, relating to the all the doubts they had as a result of the abuse, reflect the implication of the damaging changes in their outlooks of the future and their shattered view of the world (Linley & Joseph, 2011).

The above extracts demonstrate the serious impacts the DV had on the participants.  In their accounts, participants mentioned that one of the impacts of the abuse was that it made them question and doubt their masculinity.  Moreover, it created a sense that they are 'problematic', 'faulty' and not 'good enough' men.  Finally, in terms of their mental health, the abuse impacted their self- esteem, confidence, their views of the future and the world but also, their emotions in terms of the shame, embarrassment, anxiety and depression they felt.

**Subordinate theme 1.2. The cultural experience of male victimisation – "*It made everything more challenging for me*"**

This subordinate theme illustrates the ways whereby the participants' experiences of abuse were underpinned by cultural understandings and perceptions on gender roles and male victimisation.  In essence, this theme describes the men's experiences of being male victims of DV that are Cypriot.

All participants described how culture defined and impacted the experience of male victimisation in terms of the traditionalist and patriarchal views that most people in Cyprus still hold. Reflecting research on patriarchy and masculinity, which suggests that men could be perceived as showing 'problematic' masculinity if they do not enact a convincing description of masculine dominance and patriarchal expectations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), Panayiotis reports that, most of the time, Cypriots would judge and be prejudiced against anything that is out of the norm in terms of the patriarchal and traditionalist views that are still held in the country:

*"Cyprus is a small country…with more close minded people who are used to one way of patriarchal thinking and traditional, so anything out of the ordinary is usually judged. I believe that Cypriots, especially Cypriot men…perceive male victimisation as extremely rare, like there are zero to one in a million chances. This might be because we have limited knowledge of how common it is, maybe because our country is small and…because there are very little men who would admit that they are being abused or they might be scared to say it because they might be thinking…that Cyprus is small and a lot of people know each other and they might be scared of what people would say and especially other men"*

Panayiotis attributes the close-mindedness of people in Cyprus to the fact that the country is small and thus, not many men who might be victims of DA come forward to share their stories due to fear of others finding out and peoples' reactions which in turn, results into limited knowledge in the commonality of male victimisation. As he goes on to explain, Cypriots, and more specifically Cypriot men, will not accept or believe that a man can be a victim of female-perpetrated DA because of these traditional views, the limited knowledge and the close-mindedness of people on the island. Mirroring this, Andreas also argues that Cypriots wouldn't believe that male victimisation exists. Indeed, it has been argued that DV is exclusively a product of its social context and hence, culture thus, culturally imposed gender identities and expectations may influence the way people of that culture view DV and male victimisation (Jewkes, 2002). Interestingly, Andreas emphasises this argument by using himself as an example in the sense that he wouldn't believe that male victimisation is possible if he hadn't

experienced and witnessed it first-hand.  This creates powerful evidence for him to

backup and stress his belief of how other Cypriots would respond and react to male

victimisation:

*"I think that Cypriots they don't believe that this can happen, I mean if I didn't go through it, I wouldn't believe it happened! It's not our fault but it's how we were brought up by our parents and how they were brought up by their parents…there are traditional views…that have been forced upon us across generations and I think people say we changed and progressed.  I think we did but not in things like this"*

Andreas also puts forward another interesting argument in terms of the patriarchal and

traditional views that the culture adopts.  Andreas regards these traditional views as

'transgenerational' in that these views have been passed on from generation to

generation.  The participant also suggests that these views have been forced upon the

younger generations by previous generations in the sense that younger people are not

to blame for these views as there was no other option but to adopt them.  Indeed, as

James (2010) suggests, patriarchal notions and gender roles are prescribed in all cultures

therefore, families frequently have no choice but to reinforce and value these views as

individuals who breach these cultural gender role prescriptions are shamed by the

community.   For Andreas, it seems that these patriarchal and traditionalist views act as

barriers to understanding and accepting male victims.  Andreas also seems to be hopeful

about the fact that some views adopted by the Cypriot culture have changed and have

become more modernised but, at the same time, he argues that there is no progress in

perceptions around male victimisation.  Echoing Andreas' account, Christophoros also

argues that ideas around marriage and gender roles have improved but, at the same

time, that Cypriots still hold on to some of these.  Andreas' and Christophoros'

narratives are in line with research, which argued that, indeed the Cypriot culture has

seen an advancement in its traditional ideologies of gender identities and roles but, at

the same time, not to a great extent compared to other cultures (Peristianis et al.,

2011).  However, research has also suggested that, the notion whereby men are

perceived as the perpetrators of DA and women the victims is common in most cultures and countries (Lambert, 2011). Furthermore, in a similar way to Andreas, Christophoros also explains that younger generations in Cyprus are not to blame for their instant negative reaction towards matters like male victimisation as these reactions have been adopted by previous generations and passed on to younger ones.

Another participant adds to the above in terms of how likely it is for the Cypriot culture to accept male victimisation as an existing phenomenon:

*"I think that we, as Cypriots, especially if you ask men, that we are blind to anything else other than female victims. I think that they regard male victimisation as highly unlikely and if it happens to be true then I think that Cypriots would think that there is something wrong with the male victim and the traits that make him a man, with his strength or masculinity or power etc…they would judge and mock the male victim because they can't accept anything else other than what they know on this subject and how they perceive gender" (Giorgos)*

Giorgos argues that Cypriots, and he includes himself in this, perceive DV as an act whereby men are the perpetrators of abuse and women the victims, a perception that is common in most cultures and countries (Lambert, 2011). He also talks about the 'blindness' and rigidity of the culture, especially of Cypriot men, to consider anything different other than female victimisation. It is very interesting that Giorgos then changes from including himself to saying that other Cypriots would perceive male victimisation as an almost non-existent phenomenon as if to say that he knows it exists because of his personal experience. Giorgos adds another important dimension to the cultural understanding of DA victimisation, in which he reports that, if Cypriots come to accept male victimisation as an existing phenomenon then, this culture would immediately turn their focus to the male victim by judging him and his masculinity. As Giorgos explains, Cypriots would perceive the male victim as a 'problematic' man that doesn't have the 'correct' traits or qualities that support his gender, an accusation frequently attached to male victims (Migliaccio, 2001) from different cultural

backgrounds. The participant also brings up the notion of 'cultural mockery' whereby people from Cyprus would have negative reactions towards male victimisation and would make fun of male victims due to the culture's rigid perceptions around gender identities and roles.

Iakovos also speaks about the traditional and old-fashioned views around gender identities and roles that are prevalent in Cyprus and that would result in the 'cultural mockery' of male victims of DA and in judgements regarding their masculinity:

*"In Cyprus, where people are more traditional and old-fashioned… to hear that a man is being abused by his wife is like a joke, they will tell you to man-up and not act like a sissy and that you are making a fuss over nothing…Immediately Cypriots would think that you are less of a man, that you are weak and can't stand up for yourself, they might even categorize you as gay or womanly…I really don't understand that but I'd say it's a common way of thinking for Cypriots…that you are a coward and that anyone can boss you around, that you can't protect yourself. They will all think that you are a joke and pathetic. We are a very close-minded community with very wrong perceptions of others and a limited understanding of things that are out of the 'normal'"*

As Iakovos explains, Cypriots would accuse male victims of abuse of being overly dramatic about the violence they experienced by their female partners and they would also advise the victims to take the situation into their hands and assert their dominance as the male partner of the relationship. The participant also reports that a male victim of abuse in Cyprus would instantly be perceived as weak in that he is a coward, as he can't defend himself against his female partner and as lacking masculine qualities or as not having these qualities at all to the point that they might be judged as feminine or gay. In the above extract, Iakovos clearly shows his confusion and disagreement about the immediate negative reactions that Cypriots would have towards a male victim. Nevertheless, although he doesn't share the same perceptions, he argues that this is the common way that both Cypriot men and women would perceive male victims. Iakovos' perceived cultural reactions to male victimisation are indeed in line with the perceived reactions of male victims from different cultures (Lambert, 2011). Additionally, Iakovos

confirms what other participants mentioned regarding the 'close-mindedness' of the Cypriot culture and the limited understanding but also, the resistance to anything that is out of the Cypriot norm.  For Iakovos, there is a non-acceptance of social 'abnormalities' in countries like Cyprus, a finding common in other cultures (James, 2010).  Mirroring these negative reactions and judgments of the Cypriot culture, Christophoros says that the tendencies to make fun of, talk negatively about male victims to other people and the judgments around victims' masculinity happen so automatically for the Cypriot culture that they wouldn't even attempt to understand what it is like and how it feels to be a victim of DA:

*"I think that if they found out that a male was a victim of DA their immediate reaction would be to make fun of them, talk about them with others and doubt their "manliness"…without considering: how is this man feeling?"*

In a comparison between Cyprus and other larger countries, Christophoros reports that only Cypriots who have lived in other larger countries can accept that male victimisation exists due to the larger population and more modernized views on marriage and gender roles:

*"I think that in Cyprus, no one even considers that men can also be victims…most people think that only women can be victims…only people that have lived in bigger countries might accept this or people who have experienced it, like myself and probably my family and best friend who know what went on in our marriage. I think that Cypriots don't accept…it because…we live in this small country where we all know a lot of people and we have more old-fashioned ideas compared to bigger countries. Most Cypriots hold perceptions where the man is the head of the house, the leader, strong person, and if this is argued against…as in my case…Cypriots will be shocked!"*

Similar to Giorgos, Christophoros reports that people in Cyprus perceive DV as an act whereby women are the victims (Lambert, 2011), and that only people who have

personally experienced it and their loved ones who know about the abuse can accept male victimisation.  Christophoros attributes the fact that Cypriots don't perceive male victimisation as a phenomenon that exists to the size of the country.  Firstly, in the sense that a lot of people in Cyprus know each other because it is smaller than other countries and so, a lot of men might be fearful of sharing their experience of DA due to the predicted negative reactions of the culture but also, because of fear that their stories might be then further discussed and made fun of with other people.  Secondly, it seems that for Christophoros, because of the small size of the country, there is not much interaction with other cultures for new and more modernised perceptions to develop so as a result, old-fashioned perceptions around gender roles still exist and this in turn, leads to a rejection of the idea of male victimisation.  However, research suggests that even if someone with certain cultural understandings immigrates to another country with different/opposing cultural perceptions, they will still, more often than not, continue to hold on to their original cultural perceptions; as in the case of immigrants, refugees etc. (James, 2010).   Christophoros also emphasizes the cultural shock of male victimisation in his effort to explain that the country will be in total shock if the perceptions that Cypriots hold regarding masculine roles are challenged.  The participant then goes on to describe the almost involuntary negative reaction of the Cypriot culture towards male victims of abuse:

*"Because of our old-fashioned ideas here, without even knowing it, most of them would either make fun of a man that was a victim of abuse, especially physical…or they would not help that much because they might think he will manage, he is a "man", or they would gossip about it and let everyone know, because we are such a small country that almost everyone knows everyone!"*

In line with all of the above, Christophoros says that Cypriots would have an immediate reaction of making fun of the male victim, especially if the abuse was physical.  He also added that, Cypriots would not help the male victim, as they would a female victim, as they believe that he could manage by himself because of his gender; a finding in line

with studies on gender stereotypes and how these influence DV perceptions (e.g. Poorman et al, 2003; Seelau et al., 2003, Seelau & Seelau, 2005). This, as he explains, is because of the perceptions the culture holds on what 'being a man' means and what this entails.

Echoing all the above accounts of cultural understandings on gender roles and IPV, Stavros also argues that the Cypriot culture doesn't acknowledge that male victimisation exists and that the most probable reaction of Cypriots to this phenomenon would be to judge and pass comments about the male victim's masculinity in a way that would suggest that they are making fun of him. For Stavros, as for the other participants, this is due to the fact that most Cypriots still hold onto old-fashioned, traditional and patriarchal perceptions on gender that have not been further developed or modernized due to the fact that the country is small and not as developed as other larger countries thus, Cypriots are not exposed to different or new ideas: *"This is because of all the old and out-of-date ideas we have, we are such a small island that doesn't have the opportunity to come in contact with anything new".*

The participants also considered the similarities and differences of whether the experience of DA is the same for all male victims or if it is an experience that is influenced by culture. Two out of six participants argued that the experience is different for male victims given their culture. Andreas reports that the experience of male victimisation is different from culture to culture due to the way in which a culture perceives certain phenomena that leads to whether or not they accept them:

*"I think that it is different because in every place you find different people with different mentalities that believe in different things than what you or anyone in your place believes in. I think that given…how people were brought up and the country they live in, if it is large, smaller, more open or closed or more accepting or if something is more common in other countries and it isn't in yours or if it is something that people talk about and it might be in the news and there might be professionals that are experts in that*

*matter, it makes it better, easier...so I think it is different, we see things with various lenses that might not be the same to other people"*

Andreas adds that another aspect that makes the experience different for male victims given their culture is how talked about the issue is.  He explains that people of a certain culture might be more open or accepting of issues, like male victimisation, when they are exposed to these issues more frequently.  Stavros was the second participant that described how the experience of male victimisation differs from culture to culture and how this experience is worse for male victims that are from countries like Cyprus, which are smaller, have more old-fashioned views and issues like male victimisation are less talked about: *"I believe that it is different for male victims in different cultures.  For example, I think that for someone like me that is from Cyprus, or from another country that is small and has more old-fashioned views it is more difficult, the whole experience is more intense and painful whereas if you are a male victim from England let's say it might be a bit different and a male victim there might not be thinking the things that I was thinking about because there, they might have more awareness on the subject and they might be more accepting"*

Interestingly, one participant contradicts the notion that the experience of IPV is different for male victims from different cultures.  In line with Lambert's (2011) argument that men are perceived as the perpetrators of DA and women the victims in most cultures and countries, Giorgos talks about the 'cultural universality' of male victimisation by reporting that most cultures hold the same perceptions about gender identities and roles: *"I believe that it is the same because more or less every culture...holds these gender identities and has a perception of how men should act and then respectively how women should act. It's not that some people haven't changed*

*these perceptions or that everyone believes that these identities are clear-cut but… I believe most people hold these identities…so I think that it is the same for all men"*

Iakovos, on the other hand, argues that male victims from various cultures experience the abuse differently by saying that it is the same experience for cultures that have the same traditional and 'close-minded' views with the Cypriot culture: *"I guess it's the same for any community of people that have the same close-minded people with the same dumb views and lack of understanding…if you are in a more understanding community where people are less skeptic and judgmental or cynical then, it would be easier to deal with it and also if they are more educated…on gender and are exposed to these matters more"*. Iakovos went on to show his clear objection to these views by calling them "dumb" and "cynical". The participant also mentions that his experience of male victimisation was more difficult given his Cypriot culture, as he explains that is easier for male victims to work through the experience if they are part of a culture that is more open-minded, understanding, flexible with its views and exposed to such issues more frequently.

Two participants spoke about the experience of male victimisation being the same from culture to culture but, at the same time, they also argued that the extent of difficulty might be different in that male victims coming from cultures that are similar to the Cypriot one might think about the experience and it's impacts more intensely. Also, because it might be more difficult to process due to the perceived reaction of the culture and the perceptions it holds regarding gender identities. Panayiotis talks about the 'universality of pain' and explains that the experience of DA affects all victims in the same way irrespective of whether the victim is male or female or from different cultures. However, the participant then notes that the only difference that is possibly influenced by the culture of the victim is that it's not about the experience per se but

about the constant thoughts and worry of how the victim's culture will react to their experience.  Panayiotis concludes that, as a result of this, it might be more intense and worse for male victims that come from cultures that have more traditional views on gender, as they would be fearful of being judged for not acting in the way that is expected by their culture, mirroring James' (2010) argument about communities shaming individuals who breach gender role beliefs: *"The experience…is damaging to anyone no matter gender…or culture, age or anything…everyone feels pain, humiliation, sadness, anger and rejection the same. Some people would say that…communities with a more traditional way of thinking would have it worse as people are expected to act in a way that is considered normal and anything out of that is talked and gossiped about which only makes people feel worse and this might be the only difference that people in countries or communities like in Cyprus might think about it more so the difference might be the thoughts that go into our mind about the experience regarding what others from our country will say"*.  Likewise, Christophoros reports that the experience of male victimisation and the impacts of the abuse are similar from culture to culture but, at the same time, he argues that the difference lies in the perceptions and reactions of the culture that the male victim is part of.  The participant explains that the negative and shocked reactions of cultures that have more traditional and rigid perceptions might make it more difficult for male victims to process the experience as they might feel rejected and not understood or acknowledged by their cultures: *"It's not anything specific about being Cypriot…I believe that the impacts are more or less the same and…many of the thoughts we have are the same…but I think it might be different in the extent for example in smaller countries like Cyprus because of our culture…and our perceptions… the reaction of people is one of shock mostly that they can't believe that something like this happened…so I think when you get this reaction as a male victim it might be more difficult to get past it compared to if you live in a bigger country that is*

*more open-minded, open to new ideas and that is more modern in its perceptions. It's not that it happens only in countries like Cyprus, I think that the difference in how accepting cultures are and as a result, I think the more accepting a culture is, the easier...you get over it"*

The participants also specifically concentrated and described their personal experiences of being Cypriot male victims of IPV.  Andreas describes how much more intense and challenging the experience was, given his culture and Cypriot perceptions on gender roles.  The participant further explains that the experience was more difficult for him as a Cypriot male victim due to the perceived criticism about his masculinity that he would receive from strangers who may find out about his experience: *"My experience of a male victim that is Cypriot is that it made everything more challenging and intense...I think that if someone was to find out that wasn't a close friend or family member and was just someone that didn't know me that they would criticize me and my gender and if I fit the stereotype of my gender"*

Panayiotis portrays the experience as really damaging in that, because of his Cypriot culture, he ruminated more over the experience and doubted his whole reality as a Cypriot man: *"It was really damaging...as a Cypriot male victim, it made me think more of it...because of the way we are as a society and our perceptions... it made me doubt myself more and...think more about what other people would say about me, especially people of the same gender as me... because of the somewhat clear-cut gender roles we are supposed to follow as Cypriots...it's like it planted this seed or this little person that started asking questions and doubted me...and it made me come to the conclusion sadly that...they would have judged first my manliness so this influenced my thinking and it made me more aware of my experience...it made me feel more embarrassed and exposed it was like I was stuck on it and went round and round which made it more*

*difficult to get away from it".* Panayiotis explains that the Cypriot culture's rigid perceptions, on how men and women are supposed to act, intensified the experience of male victimisation. He also adds that the cultural aspect of male victimisation intensified the thoughts and perceived reactions of what other people would say about his experience and especially, how other Cypriot men would react to it. Panayiotis concluded that the response he would have received if people found out that he was a male victim of abuse would be a negative one as he believes that people would judge his manliness and in turn, he was left feeling extremely embarrassed to the point that he felt exposed and more aware of his masculinity and experience as a male victim.

Lastly, Christophoros talks about the cultural isolation of being a Cypriot male victim of DA in that he felt very lonely and almost different to other Cypriots because he felt embarrassed as a Cypriot male that didn't fit the cultural perceptions of his gender role and also, because he couldn't share his experience as he was very fearful of their reactions: *"It's all the old-fashioned ideas we have, and it's not nice and not at all helpful for the person that is suffering because it's like my culture, my people don't accept what I have been through and it gets very lonely, you are in your country with your people but it feels lonely because you can't tell them, you are afraid or ashamed or embarrassed"*

In summary, this theme drew attention to the cultural aspects of male victimisation and on how a male victim's culture can have a further impact on this experience. Furthermore, it considered in detail how a culture's perceptions and understandings on gender roles could influence a male victim's thoughts of how the people that share that culture will react to their experience of DA. Finally, all participants implied that smaller countries tend to have more traditional and patriarchal views on gender leading to a potential rejection of the existence of male victimisation and as a result, a limited

understanding and a more judgemental attitude towards male victims that in turn, may suffer more intensely in such communities.

**Superordinate theme 2. Living with the abuse and escapes from the abuse. "I was the one that tried to bring peace"**

This superordinate theme explores the techniques and strategies but also, the activities that the participants engaged in, to help themselves get through the difficult experience of DA.  The participants' accounts were in line with female victims' accounts of strategies employed in order to cope with the abuse (Hydén, 1999; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1999; Sabina & Tindale, 2008).  Furthermore, these accounts were also consistent with research on male victimisation and strategies that other male victims employed (Hogan, 2016; Josolyne, 2011).  Echoing the experiences of both female and male victims, all the participants described how they tried to avoid arguments and incidences of violence (Haeseler, 2013; Josolyne, 2011).

Iakovos reports that he acted as the 'peacemaker' of the relationship by attempting to reason and calm his partner down.  At the same time, Iakovos describes a situation in which he forced himself to apologize to his abusive partner, even when he wasn't to blame and was feeling low, for the sole purpose of maintaining the relationship.  However, he then notes that his efforts to bring peace to the relationship mostly failed as his partner interpreted this strategy differently and as a result, the arguments mostly escalated:

*"I was the one that tried to bring peace…despite the fact that I was either on edge or getting frustrated easily or felt very lonely and sad and also that I felt degraded every time she would hit me, I would still apologize just to keep us going as a couple.  The first thing I tried doing was to talk to her calmly but this usually wouldn't work so then I usually went to the gym, when I noticed that the argument was starting to get too*

*heated or when she started to throw things or hit me with the broom or slap and kick*

*me. I guess I tried to avoid by leaving the room as much as possible but this would make*

*it worse because she would get angrier and then accuse me of other things such as*

*cheating. Another thing that I used to do would be…buying her different things she liked*

*to calm her down but that never worked either"*

Iakovos explains that when the arguments became heated, and his partner physically

abusive, he would avoid it by either leaving the room his partner was in or going to the

gym. Research on male victimisation suggests that male victims find that trying to

reason with their partners as ineffectual so they often engage in avoidance strategies

such as fleeing from home, in order to temporarily escape their partner's problematic

behaviour (Josolyne, 2011). Furthermore, some men who are victims of DV engage in

physical exercise as a coping method in order to relieve the tension (Josolyne, 2011), as

evident from Iakovos' account. At times, Iakovos attempted to please and pamper his

partner by buying her gifts in order to avoid her abusive behaviours and any conflict.

Christophoros also attempted to restore peace by trying to reason with his partner and

by picking up the pieces each time she had an anger outburst however, his attempts

also seemed ineffectual: *"I think in the arguments, I was the one that was trying to*

*restore peace. I always tried to talk to her, to calm her down and to pick up the objects*

*she threw at me and tidy up the mess she left behind her each time she exploded from*

*anger. But I never managed to calm her down"*


Echoing Iakovos' approach, Andreas also attempted to reason with his partner but he

also tried to reassure her that he was faithful to her:

*"What I tried to do was be really reasonable with her and explain that what she was*
*saying didn't make any sense. I also tried to reassure her that I wasn't having affairs with*
*the people she thought I was…And when she said something about my family or when*
*she did something weird or when she called them, family or my friends or work that is*

*when I would get angry and raise my voice. When she started hitting me though, I would never push her back or anything, I would try to get away, leave the house or go away from her or sometimes hold her arms but...because I am a bit stronger, I didn't want to cause her any pain so I would just let her"*

Andreas also reports that the only incidences he raised his voice was when his partner involved his family, friends or colleagues in their arguments.  For Andreas, it seems that this happened in an effort to gain back some control in arguments that weren't directed only towards him, as they involved people that mattered to him.  Indeed, evidence from both male and female victims of abuse suggests that occasionally victims might engage in aggravating behaviours, such as raising their voice, in an effort to gain control over the argument or violence (Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998).  Nevertheless, Andreas explains that he would avoid any incidences in which his partner became physically abusive, by either leaving the house or getting away from her, as he didn't want to harm her.  In a way, Andreas seems to be exhibiting the fight or flight response to threats and traumas as often reported in DV research (Chamberlain, 2008).  Interestingly, Andreas' account as well as the accounts of all participants are in contrast with evidence, which suggests that women become violent towards their male partners as a response to their partners' abuse (Swan et al., 2008).  All participants reported not being violent towards their female partners even at times when their partners were violent against them.  It seems that the participants were faced with a paradox surrounding DA and gender role perceptions whereby men cannot and do not want to use violence against women yet their female partners found it acceptable to use violence against them.

A number of participants also reported that their attitudes in arguments changed over the course of the abuse in that, as time went by, they became more passive and took up the role of the 'compliant target' that was at their partner's disposal at any given time:

*"I was the person that didn't do anything, my role was to be there, get beaten and didn't react...I was like the punch bag in boxing, she lashed out at me and I took it, I was the*

*one she used to get her anger out so my role was that of the person she would do something bad to so that she could calm her nerves and her self down…that was how I managed them, I stayed silent…once she finished I would go to the garage and play my music that relaxed me a bit. I found that at times, not replying to her made her angrier and this was really stupid of me…because everything escalated really quickly those times and at other times when she was not that angry, not responding made her feel like she was right and she calmed down quicker, but to some of the arguments I responded, particularly at the start of our marriage before it got worse" (Giorgos)*

Giorgos is describing a situation in which he became the 'punch bag' in the relationship because he acted as the outlet of his partner's anger.  In a sense, it seems that the participant adopted this passive behaviour in order to get the argument over with so that he could then go into his 'safe haven', the garage, and try to relax with an activity that pleased him.  Giorgos also reflects on his partner's response to this approach and argues that at times, being more passive worked for him as his partner interpreted this as an act whereby he acknowledged what made her angry but at the same time, this approach backfired when she was really angry and only made things worse for the participant.  Becoming more passive to a partner's violent behaviour is an approach that has been adopted by female victims of DV in order to avoid conflict (Hydén et al., 1999).  Moreover, the 'passive acceptance' approach has also been adopted by male victims of IPV and is reflected in the limited research on male victimisation (Josolyne, 2011).

One participant, engaged in a number of behaviours and strategies as a response to his violent partner, a lot of which have been mentioned above:

*"I tried to work things out…I was the one that tried to calm her down and find ways to help her or fix it…Some of the times I would just stay quiet and let her take it all out on me but some other times I would argue back…Those fights pretty much always ended when she would hit me (Panayiotis)*

At times, Panayiotis tried to reason with his partner in order to resolve the issues that came up and restore peace to the relationship.  He also took up the role of 'victim-

rescuer' in that the violence was directed towards him and he was the one that suffered from the abuse but at the same time, he endeavoured to help his perpetrator to resolve the issue even if he wasn't to blame.  The participant then explains that at times, he also adopted a more passive attitude towards his partner whereby he allowed her to use him as an outlet for her anger but other times, he wasn't able to contain his frustration so he argued back and this aggravated his partner even more.  The result of this, was that the arguments would get worse to the point that, most of the times, his partner would become physically violent towards him.  For Panayiotis, it seems that the outcome of any approach that he adopted as a response to the abuse was the same in that he always ended up in becoming the 'compliant target' and in the passive attitude of "shutting up" (Hydén et al., 1999; Josolyne, 2016).

In line with Panayiotis' account, Christophoros also adopted the roles of both victim and rescuer with no positive outcome: *"After every argument I was there to calm her down and help her, support her if she needed anything but no change, it got worse"*.  Christophoros then adds that he tried to conceal any negative emotions in fear of making his partner's abusive behaviours and the situation worse: *"I always tried to be calm and relaxed, I didn't want to show any negative emotions because I didn't want to make it worse"*.  Finally, he adds that he felt trapped in the arguments with his partner as anything he tried to calm his partner down never worked (Josolyne, 2011) even when he showed affection or suggested professional help: *"Anything that I tried made things worse.  I also suggested going to a couples counselor but she got much worse after that"*

Another approach employed by both male (Hogan, 2016) and female victims (Waldrop & Resick, 2004) of abuse that has been employed by some of the male participants of this study was to use work as both a distraction and an avoidance strategy.  However, further research suggests that work acts as a temporary and insufficient distraction for

some men (Josolyne, 2011). One participant reports that he tried to work longer hours in order to avoid being with his partner and also, interacting with her:

*"I stayed at work longer, she was so drowning and made me feel so low that I couldn't be with her or talk to her so by being at work longer I wouldn't be in the same place with her or interact with her. I was avoiding her and her anger as much as possible. I also, which wasn't good, but it was my way out, relied heavily on alcohol, it made me forget and feel a bit better during this dreadful time but for sometime after when I was feeling very negatively about everything and tried to pick up the pieces" (Stavros)*

Stavros' above extract also mirrors research that suggests that there is a link between drug/alcohol abuse and the experience of DA (e.g. Haesler, 2013; Hines & Douglas, 2010). Similarly, the above extract also echoes findings that highlight the fact that, victims of IPV misuse drugs/alcohol in order to get through the psychological and emotional impacts of the abuse (McClennen et al., 2002).

All in all, throughout this superordinate theme participants described the various strategies they engaged in as a response to their partner's abusive behaviour and in order to cope with the abuse, with the most widely used one being avoidance. In their accounts, all participants mentioned that anything they tried to do to resolve the issues or calm their partner down typically didn't work or worse, created a bigger problem that resulted in most participants feeling helpless, trapped and confused to the point of loosing sanity in the arguments with their partners, a finding also reported by female victims of abuse (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).

**Subordinate theme 2.1. Responsibility and reasons for the abuse. "She blamed me and I picked up on that and blamed myself"**

All six participants described how they tried to make sense of their experience of male victimisation, both during and after their relationships, by attempting to understand why their female partners became abusive. The male participants seem to have

engaged in a search for meaning and this process has been argued to be of vital importance in the development of positive change after a traumatic experience (Linley & Joseph, 2011).

In terms of perceived responsibility for the arguments and abusive behaviours, Giorgos describes a situation in which he believed that he was the one to blame for the arguments to start with but, this changed over time to seeing that it was his abusive partner that was responsible for causing the arguments:

*"Back then, I would have said that the responsibility was mine, that I did something or said something…although I never did, but because I couldn't her behaviour and how it changed, I would have said that we argued because of me, because I might have done something that might have made her jealous, though I would never betray her…Also, I might have said that whenever she asked me about Theodoros' (son) mum, I got emotional or I didn't reply because…it was a really sensitive matter but because of the way I reacted to these conversations I might have been to blame for her getting jealous and thinking that I didn't love her as much and that's why she got angry but if you ask me now I wouldn't think the same. I never gave her reason to be jealous or think that I might be doing anything with anyone else and the fights about Theodoros and that we had a really close relationship well, that now I see as problematic. And, of course I loved his mum and what happened was really tragic and it was a very sensitive matter but it didn't mean I didn't love Stella (abusive partner) so now, I see the responsibility as Stella's, she was the one that caused all the arguments"*

Giorgos explains that, at the time, although he was aware of the fact that he didn't do anything that his partner should be suspicious of, he saw himself responsible for the arguments because he couldn't explain the change in her behaviour.  Another reason he initially blamed himself for the abuse was that he believed he gave his partner reason to feel jealous, and that he didn't love her as much, by not responding to or getting emotional whenever his abusive partner mentioned his ex-wife, who passed away.  In essence, Giorgos explained his partner's abusive behaviour as a response to his reactions over matters that involved his son and ex-partner and believed that he was responsible for the arguments and abuse.  Echoing the accounts of other male victims of abuse who initially excused their abusive partner's behaviour (Morgan & Wells, 2016), Giorgos initially used this justification to excuse his abusive partner's behaviour and

alleviate any responsibility from her as he couldn't explain the change in her behaviour. However, over time Giorgos saw responsibility for what it actually was (Stamp & Sabourin, 1995), in that he now knows that his partner was responsible for the arguments as her reaction to matters involving his son and ex partner were problematic and also, because he never gave her reason to believe that he was unfaithful. Similarly, Christophoros also describes how he endeavored to make sense of the experience but also, how he was left feeling uncertain as to why his partner's behaviour changed and became abusive:

*"Most of the time I blamed myself for what happened, that I was putting a lot of pressure on her because I wasn't doing anything to help her but then I realized…that she was the one that wouldn't allow me to do anything and then she blamed me, so I picked up on that and started to blame myself. Only when my family and friend said that I didn't do the things that I thought I was doing, only then I realized that I was trying to support…but she didn't want me to and that she directed her anger towards me and blamed me, but for a long time I thought that I was a worthless husband as she said and I also thought that I made it worse because I always argued that I was trying to help and…she wouldn't agree and threw things at me so I thought that I made her more angry because I couldn't realize that I was worthless and I started believing it. I strongly believe that we both made mistakes and we had different ideas about how our marriage would work out. My mistake was that I didn't say anything; her mistake was how she reacted"*

Echoing Giorgos' account, Christophoros reports that during the relationship he also believed that he was the one responsible for the arguments and the abuse. He explains that, he started to pick up on and in turn, believe that he was a "worthless husband" because of his partner's constant accusations of him not doing anything to help. Interestingly, Christophoros describes a scenario in which he frequently tried to be of help and support to his partner however his efforts were always turned down, as she wouldn't allow him to help. Then, as he notes, his partner would blame him and become abusive towards him claiming that he wasn't helping. For Christophoros, it seems that his partner was manipulating responsibility so that he would believe he was to blame and in his account, it is as if she wouldn't allow him to help for the sole purpose of having something to argue about and accuse him of later on. Indeed, a large

91

amount of research on DV highlights that perpetrators utilize their dominance to manipulate victims' perceptions of who is to blame for the abuse and generally, of reality (Stamp & Sabourin, 1995). According to Christophoros, his perceptions regarding responsibility changed after the relationship ended in that now, he believes that both were responsible for the arguments and abuse as his share of responsibility was that he didn't stop the abuse or end the relationship sooner and his partner was to blame because of her problematic reactions and behaviours. Both Christophoros' and Giorgos' accounts echo research findings that suggest that many victims frequently perceive themselves as responsible for the abuse during the time that they are still in the abusive relationship and only after the relationship has ended they revisit this and shift to an increasing acknowledgement of the perpetrators' culpability (Stamp & Sabourin, 1995).

Two participants believed that their partners became abusive because of potential mental health issues they might have suffered from and the two accounts reflect existing literature on male victimisation and the perceived reasons for abuse (Capaldi et al., 2012; Hines et al., 2007). Similar to previous literature that DV perpetrators frequently have low self-esteem (Dick, 2004), Iakovos and Stavros believe that their female partners were insecure and in turn, considered this as a reason for the abuse: *"I guess to start with, I felt that her insecurities were in the way of many of the arguments and that is why she called me names, minimised me and thought I was cheating on her" (Iakovos); "I think she was very insecure and had low self-esteem so I believe this was the reason she became abusive, controlling and jealous" (Stavros).* Iakovos then also added that another reason for his partner's abusive behaviour might be that she was anxious and under a lot of pressure due to her career: *"Then, I sort of blamed the stress resulting from her promotion"* whereas Stavros believed that his partner was suffering from depression: *"She was also down a lot of the time, and whenever she was feeling low she*

*reacted badly to anything that happened".* Additionally, Iakovos explained that he felt

responsible for the arguments and abuse (Stamp & Sabourin, 1995), because he believed

that he brought them upon himself and was in a sense, asking for them with his own

insecurities: *"I think for most of the part I believed that I was responsible in some weird*

*way for the arguments, I felt that I asked for them either by my weakness and hence,*

*lack of masculinity as I felt when she either belittled me or hit me".* On the other hand

though, Stavros viewed the responsibility for the abuse as solely on his partner that

caused the arguments and reacted in an abusive way. Stavros notes that it all comes

down to choice and that his partner was responsible because she chose to be abusive: *"I*

*believe she was the only one responsible as she was the one that chose to react in that*

*way and she chose to be abusive"*


Stavros and Panayiotis also partly attributed their partners' abusive behaviours to

hormonal changes: *"Thinking about it now I realize that most of the times the abuse was*

*worse and happened during that time of the month, usually those two weeks, before and*

*during" (Stavros);* *"After giving birth to our daughter my wife just started to lose it more,*

*that was when I realized that she became abusive…and changed her attitude towards*

*me" (Panayiotis).* A study by Hamilton and Goeders (2010) found that hormonal

changes was indeed one reason for females perpetrating violence against their male

partners.

Akin to Christophoros' account, Andreas viewed responsibility as shared between his

partner and himself because as he argues, it takes two people to get into argument: *"I*

*think that we were both responsible in the arguments because…she was controlling and*

*jealous and possessive but at the same time it takes two to get into a fight so I think I*

*was responsible when I got angry or frustrated and raised my voice because it*

*aggravated her and made things worse"*.  Similar to Iakovos' and Stavros' accounts, Andreas believes that his partner's share of responsibility lied with psychological issues or personality traits that she may have had whereas he considers his share of responsibility to be when he also got angry and reacted negatively towards his partner as if to say that he 'pushed her buttons'.  This finding parallels evidence that female victims of abuse often instigate the abuse of partners by provoking them (Hamilton & Goeders, 2010).  Interestingly, Andreas adds another layer to why he believes he is partly responsible for the abuse: *"I also think that I am responsible because…I was the one that asked her to marry me really early on because I didn't know who she truly was and I saw a person that was very loving and kind but she was exactly the opposite after we married"*.  For Andreas, the fact that he asked his partner to marry him early on in the relationship meant that he didn't get to know her well enough, which in turn, made him feel responsible for the abuse because he didn't have the opportunity to get to know what he was getting into and what his partner was like.  This, echoes accounts of male victims of DV who believed that they were victims because they didn't know their partners well before entering the relationship (Hogan, 2016).  Another reason why Andreas felt partly responsible for the continuation of the abuse was that he didn't put an end to it and didn't end the relationship sooner: *"Partly I was responsible because I put up with a lot before I told her that we couldn't continue and before I asked for the divorce"*

Finally, Panayiotis also perceived responsibility as shared between his partner and himself.  The participant perceived his partner as responsible because of the unhealthy way she managed her anger: *"I think that we both had responsibility for what went on; her responsibility was that she didn't know how to calm down and how she could let out her anger without being abusive towards me"*.  However, it seems that then Panayiotis

excuses his partner and tries to alleviate some of her responsibility by noting that she might have been experiencing negative feelings relating to the care of their daughter so Panayiotis blames himself for not being around and helping more: *"But then again, she was under a lot of stress and she might have also felt a bit lonely at home…taking care of Liza and I think that my responsibility was that because I was so tired from work I wasn't around a lot and couldn't help her so I think that if things were different with my work we wouldn't have been in the situation that we were in"*.  This finding is in line with Hamilton and Goeder's (2010) study who found that women often get frustrated and become violent with daily gendered life stressors (such as caring for children, cooking etc.) or when they believe that their husbands expect these 'wifely' duties from them and especially, when they are under the impression that these duties are not appreciated by their male partners.  Panayiotis seems to be very angry with his ex-partner and solely blames her for his daughter's attitude towards him, as he believes that she turned their child against him:  *"I blame only her about how my daughter is treating me now because I think that she is behind it and everything that she tells Liza about me"*

**Subordinate theme 2.2. The deceitful perpetrator – Progression and nature of the abuse. "I couldn't have seen it coming"**

This subordinate theme provides strong evidence that the male participants of this research were victims of DV perpetrated by their female partners and thus, that male victimisation is an existent phenomenon (Hines, et al., 2007).  All participants mentioned that they suffered a range of violent behaviours, including verbal and direct physical abuse, at the hands of their female partners.

*Psychological and emotional abuse*

Most participants described how the psychological and emotional abuse they suffered was constantly 'chipping away' their self-esteem, worth and confidence:

*"All those things I heard from her...the constant accusations and saying that I was worthless and the nasty things she always said about my looks, my body type or my personality, were really bad for my self-esteem, I believed them for a long time and they had a huge impact about how I felt about myself"* (Stavros)

In the past, evidence frequently suggested that the impact of emotional abuse on the self-esteem of female victims is much more severe compared to male victims (Mills, 1984) however, Stavros' account along with the accounts of all the participants are contradictory to such evidence. Indeed, recent research is in line with the participants' accounts and suggests that the impact of psychological abuse can be equally severe on the self-esteem of male victims (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). The impacts of all forms of abuse on the male participants have been discussed extensively in theme 1.1.

The most common forms of psychological abuse reported by the participants were belittling and humiliating. Christophoros reports that his partner constantly criticised him about his job and the income he earned compared to other men they knew. He also describes how difficult it was for him to listen to his partner calling him stupid and incompetent in terms of his work related abilities: *"She became very rude, minimising my job and the income I got but also my skills. It was very difficult to listen to her saying that I was stupid and that I wasn't getting enough money as the husbands...of her other friends"*. The way Christophoros was feeling as a result of his partner's accusations relating to his work and income, can be explained by evidence which suggests that men feel a significant amount of failure and shame when they are faced with work related issues as this suggests that they are failing in their gender role of being the breadwinners; a role that they strive for (James, 2010). Christophoros then explains that the most difficult part of the emotional abuse he suffered was that his ex-partner did not only belittle him behind closed doors but, she also humiliated him in front of other people making the emotional abuse and her negative opinions and accusations of him public: *"The most difficult part was that she was saying this...in front of my family, her*

*family, her friends and their partners, her colleagues, everyone! She always swore,*

*mocked me and shouted".* Research suggests that emotional abuse is used in order to

humiliate and shame male victims, to make them feel incompetent, useless and

eventually reduce their self-esteem (Papanis, 2008). Furthermore, the perpetrator very

frequently exhibits such behaviours in front of other people, mirroring Christophoros'

experience, with the purpose of ridiculing the victim further (Papanis, 2008).

Christophoros adds that apart from being humiliated by his partner, he was constantly

assigned all of the blame for everything that happened in the couple's life: *"She blamed*

*me for everything, money issues…that I didn't care about her and didn't respect her, that*

*I was worthless…that I was interested in my friends and family more than her or that I*

*was interested in other women and I never did anything she said"*

Two participants reported that the criticisms along with the minimising and humiliating

comments were directed to their masculinity so as if to imply that they are not men

enough:

*"I suppose it started with her just demeaning me...making fun of me…she would make*
*fun of how weak I looked or that I'm not man enough. She would then start pointing out*
*all the things I wasn't good at like being funny or romantic…she was always demeaning*
*towards me…from day one…but I thought she was joking because I was thinking that she*
*wouldn't have been in a relationship with me if she thought that I was so dumb and…as*
*time went by, it became even worse and it wasn't only once, she did it constantly"*
*(Iakovos)*

In the above extract, Iakovos describes how the emotional abuse started. He explains

that his partner initially mocked him and criticized his masculinity to imply that he was

weak and that, in a way, he didn't meet masculine expectations of strength and

domination (Connell, 2005). Iakovos' account is indicative of similarities with evidence

on female victimisation, which suggests that one of the reasons why women are

victimized by their male partners, is that they fail to meet stereotypical gender roles

(Salam, Alim, and Noguchi, 2006). Interestingly, Iakovos' account also mirrors accounts

of male victims who reported that their female partners belittled their masculinity because they believed that their male partners weren't dominant or strong enough (Hogan, 2016). As a result, it seems that failure to meet expected gender roles may be a contributing factor to DA victimisation for both women and men (Hogan, 2016). Iakovos then goes on to mention that the psychological abuse escalated with his partner criticizing anything he wasn't good at, his perceived 'flaws'. Similar to physical abuse, evidence suggests that psychological abuse often escalates in a violent relationship with the perpetrator becoming more emotionally abusive towards the victim (Schumann & Valente, 2002). Moreover, although the participant acknowledges that his partner was emotionally abusive towards him from the start of the relationship, and even when they were only friends, he explains that he didn't perceive her negative comments towards him as abusive because it didn't make sense to him that someone could be in a relationship with a person they criticized as being weak or incompetent so, he perceived her criticisms as an innocent joke.

Echoing the above accounts, Panayiotis also reports being constantly belittled by his female partner in all the identities that he holds, including his masculinity: *"She constantly went on about my job, about the money and that I was to blame for the few customers I had and then about my incompetence as a man, husband and father"*. Panayiotis' account highlights that the blame for all the issues the family/couple experienced was constantly and solely assigned to him: *"She would undermine everything I did, she would blame me...for our difficult financial situation, she judged me a lot about everything and called me names, she would put me down and make me feel bad about my job, she would say that I didn't care about her or my daughter, that she did everything at home and that I wasn't doing anything for my family, that I wasn't around and she constantly called me a lousy father"*. It seems that Panayiotis' partner

also tried to gain control through the use of their child, a finding frequently reported by other men (Morgan & Wells, 2016).

*Physical abuse*

All participants reported the changes in the method and format of violence they suffered in terms of the escalation, from mainly emotional to physical abuse, and from one off incidences of abuse to more regular abusive behaviours, a finding consistent with evidence on male victimisation (Hines et al., 2007). Physical abusive behaviours towards the male participants included being scratched, pinched, punched, bitten, kicked and choked by their partners:

*"She started to pinch me and scratch me and hit me and most of the times I would end up with marks and bruises" (Giorgos)*

*"One day we got into a heated argument and she had slapped me and that's when the more violent things begun, she would start slapping me more frequently, hitting me, eventually kicking me" (Iakovos)*

*"The abuse then became physical, she would hit me, and I know it's strange to many people basically that a woman would be able to hit a man" (Andreas)*

*"A couple of months after our daughter was born she started slapping me and kicking me" (Panayiotis)*

*"She did all sorts of violent things to me, she kicked me, scratched me, bit me several times and once or twice she tried to choke me whilst I was in bed and ready to go to sleep" (Stavros)*

All the above accounts indicate that the participants' female partners used severe physical violence against them in line with other research findings on male victimisation (Drijber et al., 2013; Hines et al., 2007; Hines & Saudino, 2003; Hogan, 2016). Additionally, this finding is in contrast to the general notion that the physical abusive behaviours females exhibit against their male partners are minor in nature (Saunders, 2002). Interestingly, some men also reported that their female partners physically abused them with methods that didn't rely on strength:

*"As time went by, the things she threw got heavier…she would throw anything, I had saucers thrown at me, mugs anything you can imagine, once, she attacked me with the long stainless steel part of the vacuum and one night whilst she was cutting the salad and I was cooking she cut my arm with the knife" (Giorgos)*

*"She also hit me with the broom if it was in reach" (Iakovos)*

*"She mostly threw plates…or pots or mugs, mostly things she found in the kitchen. I remember that once she picked up a candle and threw it at me whilst I was watching TV, I was so shocked I didn't know where it came from! It was so unexpected!" (Christophoros)*

The above accounts support findings of previous research suggesting that abusive female partners utilise physical objects and weapons during abusive incidences to make up for a possible inadequacy of physical strength (Flynn, 1990). Christophoros' account also illustrates that his partner's violent behaviour was spontaneous at times in that even when an argument wasn't taking place, his partner was still physically aggressive towards him. This unplanned outburst of physical aggression has also been reported in other research of DV (Hogan, 2016). In their accounts, all participants described how the physical aggressive behaviours of their female partners escalated as time went by and became more severe, a finding commonly reflected in DA research (e.g. Hogan, 2016; Schumann & Valente, 2002). Furthermore, all of the above accounts that highlight the use of direct physical violence by female partners are contradictory to findings, which propose that females prefer psychological or verbal forms of violence (e.g. Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Eatough, Smith, & Shaw, 2008) and that male victims are much less frequently injured during physical abusive incidents (Swan et al., 2008).

*Other forms of abuse*

The majority of participants reported suffering a number of other abusive behaviours including financial abuse, threatening their families, using their children as a weapon to control or to cause more emotional pain and isolation from close relatives and friends.

One participant states that his partner used his credit card on a number of occasions without permission, to buy very expensive products that the couple could not afford:

*"Things got worse when she started using my card, she knew my password, I mean she was my wife, I trusted her! I would have never thought that she would do the things she did so, without asking for my permission she used it to buy the expensive things she saw"*. Christophoros explains that, because she was his wife, he trusted her in having his card details and in knowing what the couple could afford but also, that he was shocked

as he was blind to her nature and didn't expect in any way his partner's actions. Research on male victimisation has concentrated mostly on physical and/or verbal forms of abuse so little is known about other forms such as financial abuse perpetrated by women towards their male partners (Williams, Ghandour & Kub, 2008). However, in one study male victims indicated that their female partners abused them by controlling the money the couple had either by not allowing them to see or use any credit cards or check-books or by spending all of their savings (Hines et al., 2007). Moreover, another study categorized financial abuse as a form of psychological violence and reported that financial harm was amongst the most frequent forms of such violence (Drijber et al., 2013). Christophoros then goes on to describe how he reacted whenever he found out that his partner used his card to purchase something very expensive: *"I would never get angry…I was so blind and so in love and trusting that I just had conversations with her and said things like 'It's okay if you forgot but we should start saving because we won't have any money left'"*. It seems that the participant tried to create excuses for his partner in that she might have forgotten that they were struggling financially in order to reassure her, politely remind and warn her that if they are not careful they might end up having financial struggles. Christophoros seems to direct the blame to himself for his partner's behaviour in the sense that if he realised her 'true colours' and ended the relationship sooner most of the abusive behaviours and financial difficulties he found himself in could have been prevented. Consequently, it is evident from the emphasis he places in the following extract that he feels angry at himself: *" I was really stupid for not realising and not ending it sooner! Whenever I think of it I feel angry with myself!"* Finally, Christophoros reports that his partner would falsely accuse him of calling her a thief when no money was left in his account as a result of her actions. It seems that now, Christophoros sees an irony in her accusations as to him, this was what she was essentially doing but at the time, he didn't perceive this as abuse because of his love and

trust for her: *"Whenever I said that we had no money left in my account she was shouting and saying that I was accusing her of being a thief...it's so ironic, thinking of it now she actually stole the money because I was unaware most of the times and it was my account and the money I worked for! But I never meant that when we were together, I was so in love with her that it didn't even cross my mind"*

Two participants reported that their partners tried to isolate them from family and friends, a finding commonly reported by male victims of DA (Morgan & Wells, 2016). Giorgos notes that his partner would try to control him by employing different methods, including what felt like an interrogation, as she expected him to report anything he did during the day for example, any interaction he had, where he was etc.: *"She got very jealous and I mean it makes you feel nice to a point, I mean it makes you feel that the other person you are with really wants you...but her jealousy was much more extreme than that...at the time I didn't consider that abuse...but when she got very controlling and wanted to know everything that I did, where I was with whom and so on, it got really bad and I felt like I was drowning"*. Giorgos explains that to start with, he didn't perceive his partner's jealousy and controlling behaviour as abusive because, to a point, he thought that it was his partner's genuine feelings of love and care that made her behave in that way. However, he then says that he started realizing that her behaviour might have been problematic when the jealousy and control reached an unhealthy point that resulted in him feeling like he was drowning in the relationship. Giorgos also reports that his partner tried to control him by choosing who and when he would see people as she locked him in the garage on a number of occasions to prevent him from seeing colleagues, friends and family. In essence, Giorgos is describing the moments when his partner would try to isolate him and on one occasion, this interfered with work: *"She locked me in the garage, when I went there to relax...I think she really wanted to isolate*

*me from everyone because she did that when she knew that I had to go somewhere…once I didn't go to work because I was locked in…on one night I was supposed to meet a colleague of mine for drinks and we got into an argument, I went to the garage to listen to some music and after an hour or so when I had to go…I realized that she had locked me in!"*. Giorgos' emphasis on his partner's actions indicates that he is still shocked with her behaviour and the methods she employed to abuse him. Andreas also describes how his partner attempted to isolate him from his family and friends by controlling who he interacted with and by interfering with his social life: *"She became controlling around who I saw at work, how many times I went to my parents house, or my friends. She used to call my parents or friends, who…after we got married, they all started to dislike her because of what she was doing…she used to call them and say 'he is married now, so he has to stay at home'"*. From Andreas' account, it is clear that his family and friends started to dislike his partner as she became very possessive over him. Findings that highlight how perpetrators attempt to control their partners' lives and to isolate them from other people have been evident in research concerning both male and female victimisation (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Hines et al., 2007; Xu et al., 2005 etc.). Some participants, including Andreas, mentioned that the abuse was also directed to their families by minimising and/or threatening them: *"she would always say that my parents…weren't good parents and are unemotional…she then started threatening my family…by sending messages either on the phone or as emails or placed them in their post boxes! I can't even believe she did that! I mean who does things like that?!...She was saying things like, it's your fault we broke up, you were behind our divorce and you will pay for it'…I felt so embarrassed that I even married her!"*. From Andreas' response, it is clear that he is confused, frustrated and embarrassed by his partner's behaviour to the point that he regrets marrying her.

Consistent with current literature on the various methods employed by female perpetrators aimed at controlling their male partners are Giorgos' and Andreas' accounts that describe how their partners sabotaged or interfered with their employment (Hogan, 2016): *"She contacted my boss at work, at first I felt embarrassed to the point that I wanted to quit my job, I couldn't even look at my boss or colleagues because I thought that they would be making fun of me and discussing between them the conversation she had with my boss but also, that she is the leader of the house and that I am like a sheep that follows…that she is wearing the pants in our house"* *(Andreas).* Andreas remembers feeling extreme embarrassment and shame at work as a result of his partner's actions to the point that he wanted to quit his job. The participant also seems to be talking about the power imbalance in his relationship in that he believed, but was also fearful of other people noticing, that his partner was the one that controlled everything in their relationship leaving him with no autonomy or power. Mirroring this, evidence suggests that a number of women interfere with their partners' employment in an effort to damage their masculine role of being the 'breadwinner' (Allen-Collinson, 2009). For both Andreas and Giorgos, their partners' actions and behaviours resulted in a control cycle in which their partners micromanaged their daily lives and restricted their social interactions and autonomy, a form of abuse repeatedly described by female victims (Keeling & Fisher, 2012; Xu et al., 2005).

Another form of abuse that one of the participants suffered, which also reflected findings of other studies on male victimisation (e.g. Drijber et al., 2013; Hines & Saudino, 2003; Morgan & Wells, 2016 etc.), included using their child as a weapon to control and punish him: *"When she got really angry she used to say that Liza wasn't my child…that made me doubt myself a lot, it messed with my mind… I felt…not a man basically…but I know that Liza is mine because…when Liza was really young…I asked for a DNA test*

*and…it was one of the days I was really lucky because she was in a good mood and…she said she wanted to put my mind at ease and the results showed that she was mine so at least she couldn't use that anymore against me because I think that one was the most hurtful thing that she told me".* As Panayiotis explains, his partner purposefully mentioned that he wasn't the father of their child, although she knew that this wasn't the case, in an effort to control and punish him and prove that he wasn't a good father and to make him doubt and feel a 'faulty' man that wasn't even capable of having his own child. It seems that this was one of the few times that Panayiotis took action given that using their child was the worst abusive behaviour for him that also impacted his confidence and messed with his sanity.

Several participants spoke about the reconciliation patterns in their relationship by concentrating on the forced apologies they had to give in order to calm their partners down, for example: *"She would never apologise for hitting me or for shouting at me or minimising me…I was to blame for all that so I always apologised…even if I wasn't to blame…to not make it worse" (Stavros).* According to Stavros, his female partner never apologised for any of her abusive behaviours and he was the one to blame for everything as if to suggest that, for his partner, the abusive behaviours were justified because he was the one that did something wrong. Interestingly, these findings are in contrast to other male victims' accounts as they reported that their perpetrators were remorseful and apologetic, especially at the start, for their behaviours (Hogan, 2016).

All in all, in this subtheme participants described the nature and progression of the abuse they experienced. All the men spoke about the 'blurry nature' of the abuse in that they were confused and didn't know to start with if their partners' behaviours were actually abusive or not, for example: *"I think that at the start I was unaware, I thought that she was overly interested in me, my day and everything" (Andreas).* The majority of

participants reported realising their partners' 'true colours' and abusive nature with the first incidence of physical abuse: *"I realized that she had it in her, to be abusive and revealed her character when she got physically abusive (Stavros)*, a finding supported by female victims' accounts who describe the confusion and shock of their partners' physical aggression (Barnes, 2013; Keeling & Fisher, 2012). However, Andreas realized that his partner was abusive when she started sabotaging his employment whereas, Panayiotis, realized when his daughter started to imitate her mother's attitude against him. Evidence, in line with Panayiotis' account, has suggested that children of partners in a violent intimate relationship frequently learn to imitate the behaviours of the abusive partner (Hines & Douglas, 2010). Finally, all the participants revisited the start of their relationships by describing how these were really positive at the start and they all concluded that they felt deceived, a finding supported by Morgan and Wells' (2016) study on male victimisation, and that they couldn't have predicted the abuse as their partners were probably hiding their true nature before their relationships got more serious: *"My sense of the whole relationship before we got married was that she just played nice really. I never could have guessed before we got married that she could get abusive, she was well mannered and was really nice and sweet" (Giorgos)*.

**Superordinate theme 3. Barriers to seeking support. "I sort of felt inferior, like by seeking support I was weaker"**

This superordinate theme highlights the participants' lived experiences of seeking and receiving support for their DA victimisation. The theme also captures the barriers that the participants experienced and prevented them primarily from seeking any type of support.

Amongst the most frequently reported barriers that the men experienced included the emotional sides of seeking support that were caused by the thoughts and perceptions the men held regarding support seeking and male victimisation. All the participants spoke about the fear and difficulty of sharing their experiences of abuse, which in turn, defined their experiences of seeking support. Their fears were mostly related to how others would react to their victimisation: *"It felt very scary to start with, all these thoughts went through my mind about what am I going to say, how they would react to it, whether there was someone else in my situation, if they saw anything like my situation before and most importantly would they make fun of me, judge me?" (Christophoros)*. Christophoros describes the numerous racing thoughts he had relating to how he would talk about his experience, how people would react to it, whether he was the 'only' abused man and hence, whether they would understand or mock him for being abused by his female partner. The six male participants reported that they were fearful of being humiliated and ridiculed if they sought support given that male victimisation and support seeking behaviours are in contrast to conventional masculine expectations, a finding often reflected in other research concerning male victimisation (Drijber et al., 2013; Morgan & Wells, 2016).

Another obstacle to seeking support and postponing this process was a fear of not being believed by support services due to the fact that male victimisation in Cyprus is not a widely spoken about matter leading to participants believing that they were the only abused men and also, due to the perceptions people hold on the matter: *"I delayed the process for a long time because I thought that they wouldn't believe me, I mean because you don't hear about this in Cyprus and people have a lot of different perceptions about how men should act and being a male victim is not one of them" (Stavros)*. Indeed, evidence has suggested that male victims often fear that others won't believe their

experiences of DA victimisation due to their gender (Hogan, 2016; Morgan & Wells, 2016), strength and physical size (Corbally, 2015; Migliaccio, 2001).

Giorgos describes the process of seeking support as very challenging to the point that, as he pictured it at the time, it might have caused him to paralyze and black-out and wouldn't have the words to describe it: *"I couldn't even voice it…I didn't even have the words for it, I felt that I was going to open my mouth and nothing would come out and that everyone would be staring at me wondering what is wrong with me"*. Giorgos added that he was fearful of people's reactions, even of the police and professionals that specifically work with victims of DA: *"The first time actually it wasn't me that called* [the police]*, I didn't have the guts to do so really…because of the fear that they would make fun of me…even the people of the organisation…imagine that this is still a taboo subject in Cyprus so imagine what it was 10 years ago when I went for support"*. Giorgos' account of the fear he felt when seeking support from professional services is in line with accounts of other male victims of DV who reported that the fear they felt defined their support seeking experiences (Hogan, 2016). Furthermore, in this extract, Giorgos also brings up the time period between the interview for the current study and the time he sought support (10 years). It seems that for Giorgos, this element acted as a contributing factor to the barriers he experienced when he sought support as he believes that the professionals he was receiving support from had never come across 'a case' like his in that he was firstly, a male victim of female-perpetrated DA and secondly, that over a decade ago this was an even more alien matter in Cyprus than what it is nowadays. In other words, it was as if Giorgos was trying to say that this doesn't happen to men and especially, at that time. Another barrier to seeking support for Giorgos was the fear relating to his wife finding out that he was seeking support for this matter, as they were still married when he did, which may have lead to even more trauma and

abuse: *"At the time I went to the organisation for the first time we were still together so I was scared that she might find out and that this would make things worse"*

In line with the above, Panayiotis also shared Giorgos' fear relating to seeking support and how people would react to his experience. Additionally, Panayiotis was fearful about the consequences on himself and his family if he shared his experience of victimisation: *"Fear of what would happen to me, my daughter…and of course the reaction of other people that haven't gone through something similar, especially the reaction of other men that don't know that this can happen and even if they knew that it happens the fact that I didn't do anything about it so many years it would make the judgements from everyone worse".* It seems that Panayiotis is particularly fearful of the reactions of other men that haven't gone through something similar or don't know that it can happen to a man so for him, a barrier to seeking support was the fear of people not understanding his experience. Moreover, as Panayiotis notes, he was also certain that people would judge him even more if they knew that he didn't stop the abuse sooner. Panayiotis' fears seem to not be misplaced as research has suggested that victims are blamed more by society the longer they stay in the abusive relationship (Eckstein, 2010).

 Mirroring the findings of other studies, adherence to masculine heterosexual assumptions that support independence in resolving issues (Oliffe et al., 2014) was another barrier that some participants experienced when seeking support. Panayiotis explains that he didn't feel comfortable to seek help from others as he was brought up to resolve matters on his own: *"I was brought up to do everything for myself and to fix anything wrong in my life by myself…I'm not used to asking for help or talking about my problems or anything that troubles me so this felt very foreign for me".* For Panayiotis, the fact that he needed to seek support and wasn't able to cope independently with his

experience of victimisation brought about feelings of anger and shame, as he perceived himself as weak and pathetic: *"I felt angry and upset, pathetic and weak because I couldn't depend on myself to get better mentally anymore and I felt the need to seek for help and support"*. Iakovos was another participant who preferred to cope with any issues independently and reported that this, created barriers to seeking support for him as he felt inferior and weaker: *"I sort of felt inferior, like by seeking support I was weaker, I think that at the time, I believed that I should have been able to deal with it by myself"*. Iakovos also added that another barrier to seeking support was the anxiety he felt about not knowing if people would understand his experience of victimisation and about whether, similar to Giorgos and Panayiotis, he would be criticized by others as well as his fear of being able to trust other people with his experience: *"I was also very stressed because I didn't know if I would find someone who would not judge me or most importantly someone that would understand what it's like. I kept thinking about what everyone would think and say of me…at the same time, I was also fearful of trusting others with my situation"*. The participants' needs to be understood, not judged and to find people they can trust echo findings which suggest that male victims' eagerness to seek support for their victimisation is influenced by a need for their experiences to be validated and by perceptions of which people they can trust (Hogan, 2016). Finally, Iakovos reports that he was also stressed about what the impacts of seeking support and sharing his experience would be on future relationships: *"And how it would affect any future intimate or family relationships or relationships with friends?"*

Adding to the above, Christophoros, Andreas and Stavros explained that shame and embarrassment were the biggest barriers for them when seeking support: *"What also delayed [seeking support] was my feelings of shame and I know that there is nothing to be ashamed of, but shame is difficult… how could this have happened to a man? Did it*

*happen to any other man?"* Although Christophoros acknowledges that there was nothing for him to be embarrassed of, he explains that he still felt very ashamed about his victimisation relating specifically to his gender and this was the main barrier for him. Echoing all of the above, regarding the fear they experienced, but also with Christophoros' account of shame, Andreas mentions that the process of seeking support was delayed by the embarrassment followed by the fear of what to expect and how professionals would react as well as the oddness of having to seek support: *"Seeking support was delayed for me because of the strangeness I felt about seeking support and also because of my anxiety…that I didn't know what to expect or how they would react…I mean they have seen other cases of DV but I was thinking: was there another man?"*. This was the same for Stavros who also argued that deciding to seek support was vey difficult mostly because of the shame that came from his experience of victimisation: *"I was constantly considering whether or not to ask for help from professionals, I knew that there are people that deal with these issues but only with female victims so I felt so ashamed of calling them and saying that I need support as a man who was abused by his wife"*. As the participants mentioned, their reluctance to seek support was also influenced by the fact that in Cyprus, the support available for DA victims is solely set up for women and their children. Reflecting this finding, evidence suggests that a number of male victims report that they have no faith that DA support services can help them as they are mostly designed for female victims (Hines & Douglas, 2010a; Oliffe et al., 2014).

Participants also spoke about whether they shared their experience of abuse with their social environment, family and/or friends, and whether they faced any barriers in doing so. Two participants mentioned that they didn't share their experience with anyone from their social environment because of their fear of how people would react: *"No, definitely not, I would never share with anyone close to me because I would be scared of*

*what they would say, whether they would understand or if the would judge me"* (Stavros). Similarly, Giorgos reported that he didn't talk to any friends/family about the abuse for the same reasons however, his son knew about the abuse as he witnessed one of the abusive incidences by accident: *"I was scared; I didn't know how people would react…that's what stopped me, I was sure that everyone would make fun of me and judge me…the only person that knows…was Theodoros and…he was the only person that I would have preferred that he didn't…it's not that I told him…he found out…because he…witnessed what was going on…we didn't know he…was standing there"*. Iakovos explained that he only shared his experience with his closest friend spontaneously after a couple of drinks that gave him the courage to open-up and given that he wanted offload: *"I mean I didn't plan it…but I had reached a point where I just needed to tell someone…after 2 or 3 beers I was just thinking that its now or never"*. Iakovos further reported that he didn't talk to anyone else, as he wanted to deal with it privately and because, similar to the participants above, he was fearful of his family's/friends' reactions/judgments and of them not understanding: *"I didn't want to involve anyone else and try to work on this relationship privately…because…I am worried about how other people will react to and…about what they will be saying about me… no one will be able to understand it if they haven't gone through the same experience themselves"*. The remainder of participants shared their experiences with both family and friends. Christophoros and Andreas spoke to their best friend as well as their parents and sibling. Both participants reported that they didn't share with anyone else for the same reasons mentioned above but also, because they feared that their social environment would make fun of them: *"I couldn't even bare to tell other friends…they wouldn't understand it…I didn't know how they would react, would they make fun of me?" (Andreas)*. Panayiotis shared his experience with his parents and closest friend however he also wanted to talk to his cousin but, decided against this, due to the negative reactions of

people he already shared it with and to not knowing how to respond to potential questions he might be asked: *"I tried to talk to…both parents and one close friend…I also tried talking to my cousin after…I didn't have the courage…after experiencing other peoples' reactions…and I imagined that he would ask the same things I ask myself…and honestly I don't know the answers…so I decided not to put myself in a position in which I can't answer…and just end up looking stupid and having my cousin judge me"*. Finally, the participants' accounts indicated that they preferred to seek support from professional services and share their experiences with them instead of their social environment, a finding that is in contrast to accounts of other male victims who chose not to seek support from professional services (Hogan, 2016).

This superordinate theme highlighted the fear and shame the male participants experienced when seeking support. The participants explained that these feelings, along with concerns of not being humiliated and being believed as well as understood, acted as barriers to seeking support for their victimisation. Finally, many of these feelings were linked to a sense of failure to adhere to the widely held masculine appropriate expectations that, in turn, had an impact on their sense of manliness (Dunn, 2012) and motivation to seek support (Randle & Graham, 2011).

**Subordinate theme 3.1 Positive and negative experiences of seeking support. "Men can be victims of DA, this was helpful to hear"**

The participants' descriptions included both positive and negative experiences of seeking support. Positive experiences for the participants of this study included the reassurance that they are not the only male victims of abuse, which helped to relieve some of the anxiety, fear and shame they were feeling in terms of their experience of victimisation and seeking support, and also, the feeling that they were understood and that their experiences were validated. Negative experiences included being re-

traumatized by systems that are in place to support victims (i.e. the police) and being viewed with disbelief and suspicion.

## Positive experiences of seeking support

In line with evidence suggesting that male victims find practical help and guidance very helpful (Hogan, 2016), most of the participants reported that the practical support they received from professionals was a very positive aspect of their experience of seeking support.  Giorgos, who was still in a relationship with his partner when he contacted the organisation, explains that he felt relieved when the people there helped him in keeping safe and when they brought him in contact with a lawyer as well as a psychologist to help him with his experience of victimisation: *"They shared a few tips on how to keep safe…because I told them that I was still in the marriage and trying to find ways of getting out of it without making it worse for me they brought me in contact with a good lawyer that mostly dealt with DV cases"*.  For Giorgos, it seems that the connections the organisation had with lawyers that specifically dealt with DA cases were very important as it allowed him to feel supported by professionals that specialized in what he was concerned about.  Andreas was another participant that highlighted the value of the practical support he received and the connection with specialized professionals: *"They were very good as they supported me in legal stuff but they also brought me in contact with a psychologist that specialised in DA"*.  Both participants reported that specialised and tailored support was important in their experiences of seeking support.  Giorgos and Andreas also mentioned that, although the first face-to-face meeting with either the organisation or the mental health practitioners was very anxiety provoking and scary, they both started to feel more comfortable and positive after the first couple of meetings suggesting that it is important to 'trust the process': *"As soon as I started getting the support and in my second or third therapy session that is when I started to*

*feel better about it" (Giorgos), "It was scary and embarrassing to start with but then as I got used to it…it felt more comfortable, I guess that's how it is supposed to be" (Andreas).* Adding to the specialized professional support, for Panayiotis and Iakovos the experience of seeking support was positive due to the stability and continuous support if needed by the organisation and psychologist: *"They brought me in contact with a psychologist and were there for me if I had any questions about anything…they guided me through everything I wanted" (Panayiotis), "They used to call me regularly…to see if I am doing okay and how I am getting on" (Iakovos)*

As most participants highlighted, another positive aspect of their support seeking experiences was the reassurance and validation they received from the professionals at the organisation regarding the existence of male victimisation and the recognition that their partners were indeed violent. The fear of being the 'only abused man' was reported by all the participants and was also reflected in findings of other studies (e.g. Hogan, 2016). As Andreas reports: *"They were also very good in reassuring me that these things happen to both men and women and that it wasn't only me that was abused by his partner. They also reassured me that what Emily was doing was not okay".* This was also particularly important for Panayiotis: *"They actually said that men can be victims of DA, and this was helpful to hear".* It appears that for all the participants this reassurance was what made seeking support a positive experience, as they were all embarrassed of being the 'only male victim' which in turn, resulted in them feeling as problematic men in that it was to do with their masculinity. Therefore, the fact that they were then informed that male victimisation does exist appeared to aid them in being less self-critical and hence, in instilling unconditional positive self regard that may have helped in recovering from the trauma of abuse (Flanagan, Patterson, Hume & Joseph, 2015).

Christophoros and Stavros explained that their support seeking experiences were positive due to the non-judgmental and empathic nature of the professionals that supported them: *"They didn't judge me and they believed me and understood, it was very important for me and helpful"* (Stavros), *"Their reaction was very warm and helpful and understanding but most importantly not judging, I think, that it was the most important part. We talked about male victims and how it is for us and at that point I felt that I wasn't alone"* (Christophoros). The participants' accounts reflect evidence that suggests that the two significant characteristics of positive support experiences for male victims are to be believed and to receive support from people that are non-judgmental and understanding (Hogan, 2016).

Negative experiences of seeking support

Three participants explained how they were let down by the police when they decided to report their abusive partners. Stavros explains that he attempted to call the police on one occasion but the response he received from the male police officer was one of suspicion and disbelief because of his gender as a victim (Morgan & Wells, 2016; Pattavina et al., 2007) and the perpetrator's as female: *"The police man laughed it off…and then he blamed me and implied that I must have used force and that's why she was fighting back! And his reaction was purely because I am a man and she is a woman!"* It appears that Stavros' frustration is about the unfairness he experienced when he tried to contact the authorities for support about a serious matter and also, because instead of receiving the support he was hoping for, he was made fun of, his experience was trivialized and in the end, the blame was wrongly diverted back to him because of his gender. The participant's narrative highlights that female on male DV is frequently mocked and trivialized or considered as less severe by many people (Morgan & Wells, 2016; Seelau & Seelau, 2005).

116

Giorgos experienced a similar reaction from the police officer that answered his call:

*"Two times I called the police, no action was taken really"*.  Giorgos' narrative

demonstrates the fruitless efforts in trying to seek support from the police.  As the

participant explains, his son contacted the police on the first occasion (due to the

participant's fears that were discussed earlier) and the reaction he received was one of

ridicule and dismissal matching the reaction his dad, Giorgos, received when he

attempted to contact them on a different occasion after a couple of months: *"The first*

*person that called was my son…they laughed and put the phone down… I tried calling the*

*police myself on another occasion when things got really bad and the response I received*

*was 'You can do something about it you are a man' and this was extremely traumatic*

*also because it sort of confirmed my fears"*.  It seems that Giorgos was re-traumatized by

the experience of seeking support from the police when he needed it the most and also

by the fact that his fears that people would mock him and perceive him as less

masculine.  This finding is in line with research, which suggests that male victims are

often victimized again by services that are designed to support female victims (Hines et

al., 2007; Morgan & Wells, 2016).  Furthermore, Giorgos explained that he justified the

officer's response, when his son contacted the police to ask for support for his own good

given that, if he was truly convinced that his fears that others would judge him were

true by the shocking response of the policeman, he would have stayed in the abusive

relationship and he wouldn't have sought further support due to the shame he would

have felt: *"The first time I thought of an excuse to justify them really because I was*

*shocked with their reaction and if at that point I thought that they were making fun of*

*me, if my fears…would have been confirmed I wouldn't have contacted the organisation*

*and I would have stayed in that relationship whatever happened to me because I felt so*

*embarrassed"*

Christophoros was the third participant that spoke about the unhelpful response he received when contacting the police. According to Christophoros, it was very difficult to share his story with the police because he was fearful of another male's reactions to telling them that he was a victim of female-perpetrated abuse: *"It was very difficult…because most people that work there are men so 'what would they say', calling them…was more scary than the service"*. Christophoros' fears appear to not have been misplaced given his sense of being mocked by the officer: *"I started to kind of share what happened but I got a sense…that the person I spoke to, who was a male, that he was making fun of me"*. Researchers have indicated that the response victims of DV receive from the police depends on the perceptions the officers hold about gender identities (Pattavina et al., 2007). As a result, similar to Andreas' account, many male victims are afraid of reaching the police for support (Hogan, 2016).

In summary, this subordinate theme presented the male participants' experiences of receiving support that were both positive and negative. Throughout the theme the complex and unique to the gender of the participants difficulties were highlighted. As researchers suggest, the men's accounts demonstrate the significance of increasing the recognition on female-perpetrated male victimisation within mental health, legal, governmental and medical occupations (McCoy, 2016).

**Subordinate theme 3.2 Coming forward for help. "I think the fact that I couldn't cope with the feelings of shame anymore"**

In this subtheme, the participants' narratives highlight the reasons behind coming forward for help and what led them to search for support and to share their experiences.

Giorgos explains that he decided to seek support when his son announced that he was in

a new relationship.  It appears that this announcement sparked a number of questions and speculations for Giorgos that reflected his concern about how he would react if his son was treated by his new partner the same way he was treated by his wife:

*"Immediately it made me think of my son and what if this new girlfriend treated him as Michelle treated me, as his father would I be okay with someone abusing my son? The thought was really distressing and I immediately thought that I would have never accepted that kind of behaviour by anyone towards my son and…that thought was so powerful that it opened my eyes and made me come forward for help"*.  The love that Giorgos has for his son created a strong emotional reaction in him as he placed himself in an imaginary scenario where the person he cares for the most was being mistreated by a partner and this, for him, acted as a turning point in deciding to seek support.  The participant's account reflects evidence, which suggest that one of the reasons female victims of DV come forward for help is out of concern for their children (Fanslow & Robinson, 2009).

Fanslow and Robinson (2009) argued that women who are victims of DA come forward for support because of not being able to endure their partner's abusive behaviours anymore.  The accounts of four out of six participants echo this finding. More specifically, Panayiotis came forward for help when he realized that he couldn't cope and tolerate his partner's violence any further and also, his daughter's attitude towards him as it replicated her mother's verbal abuse (Hines & Douglas, 2010): *"I just couldn't take it anymore…I was so depressed from all these things with my daughter's behaviour and with what my wife did to me that I finally decided to seek some help because I wasn't able to cope"*.  Similarly, Andreas also reports not being able to handle the thoughts and feelings associated with his experience of victimisation: *"I was bottling up everything to the point that I felt that I couldn't!...I was going to explode! I felt very low*

*and anxious…scared for my job, my personal life…I couldn't breathe! I also felt lonely that I was loosing friends and family but also that no one knew, it was dragging me down"*.  Andreas explains that he felt unable to breath given everything he held to himself for a long time and that he was drowning in being the only one that knew about his experience that he decided to come forward for help in attempt to release this tension.  The impacts of his experience on his emotional wellbeing and his feeling of isolation were the two other reasons he sought support.  Moreover, Christophoros shared similar reasons for seeking support: *"I think the fact that I couldn't cope with the feelings of shame anymore and the stress I felt and I was very down…I wanted answers, 'Why did it happen to me?'…I couldn't move forward and get on with my life…I had to do this for myself, for my wellbeing, I wanted to get back to my old self, I didn't know who I was anymore and what I was doing or where I was going with my life"*.  Christophoros added to the reasons and explained that, apart from seeking support because of the impacts on his mental health, he also wanted to gain closure on his experience of victimisation by exploring and potentially answering a very significant question he had about his experience relating to what it was about him that made him a victim of abuse.  The participant also explains that he lost sight of who he was due to the experience of victimisation and wanted support to find himself.  Stavros describes how he couldn't cope with the emotional impacts: *"It was the distress she left me with that led me to call, it was too much and I wasn't doing well"*

Finally and in contrast to the above narratives, Iakovos reports that his friend was the one who urged him to seek support as the emotional impacts of the abuse were visible: *"He was the one who recommended that I seek professional help because…he could see that it was dragging me down, so we went online together to search for organisations that offered support for this kind of issue"*.

## Part 4: Concluding Discussion

At this point, a summary of the research findings will be provided, which will also include a discussion about the contribution of this study to DV literature, the implications for the discipline of counselling psychology, the limitations of the study and finally, areas and suggestions for future research.

The results of this research provide an understanding of the nature of violence the male participants suffered at the hands of their female partners as well as an insight into their perceptions of the reasons behind their female partners' violent behaviours (Carmo et al., 2011).  Very frequently, the results of this study are in line with current evidence on DA perpetrated against women and men that has highlighted the co-occurrence of psychological and physical violence (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014; Drijber et al., 2013).  In particular, it has been found that verbal abuse is often a predecessor of physical abuse (Kearney, 2001), a finding also supported from the current study.  All participants in this study suffered psychological abuse by their female partners reflecting William's et al. (2008) argument that psychological abuse is the type of violence most commonly perpetrated by female partners.  Furthermore, the male participants of this study described how they endured prolonged violence from their partners that included both physical and psychological abuse.  In terms of physical abuse, the men suffered incredibly severe physical abuse tactics at the hands of their female partners including biting, kicking, stabbing, chocking etc., reflecting abuse tactics other male victims experienced (Drijber et al., 2013; Hines et al., 2007).  Moreover, in line with other empirical results that were presented in the literature review, the participants reported that their female partners utilised a variety of physical objects, for example knives, tableware etc., in their assaults (Drijber et al., 2013).  As George (2002) explains, these

types of violence are adopted by numerous female perpetrators in order to make up for their lack of physical strength given that these tactics are not dependent on strength.

A number of participants also reported that they experienced other forms of abuse including financial abuse, attempts to isolate them from family and friends, interfering with their work and using their children as weapons against them.  Female victims of DA often report that they also experienced these forms of abuse (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014) as perpetrators attempt to gain and sustain coercive control over them (Allen-Collinson, 2009).  The male participants also explained that their experiences of victimisation led them to feel isolated.  Moreover, they reported that they also experienced both internal and external obstacles when seeking and receiving support that further amplified their feelings of isolation.  Some of the participants mentioned that they experienced types of emotional abuse that are distinctive to female-perpetrated male victimisation, and which included humiliating them for not meeting dominant perceptions of masculinity, mirroring other studies on male victimisation (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Hogan, 2016).

Echoing findings, which suggest that same-gender victims find it difficult to understand signs of DV perpetrated against them (McClennen, 2005), the participants' accounts indicated that they found it challenging to identify that they were experiencing abuse by their partners.  Importantly, given the limited campaigns and government policies on male victimisation, it is possible that male victims of DA may not be aware that their partner's behaviours are abusive in the same way that female victims are as numerous campaigns exist that support female victims in identifying abuse and in seeking help (McClennen, 2005).  Furthermore, it may also be possible that our society's absence of awareness on DV against men is partly due to the limited campaigns and policies on male victimisation (Sarantakos, 1999).  Additionally, the men also struggled to

understand their partner's change to becoming abusive given that, at the start of their relationship, they didn't have any indications of their abusive nature. These attempts to attribute meaning to a partner's violent nature has also been reported by other male participants that have been victims of abuse (Hogan, 2016). Akin to current findings, the participants of this study attributed their partner's violent behaviour to either daily gendered life stressors (Hamilton & Goeders, 2010), low self-esteem (Dick, 2004) or mental health issues such as anxiety (Capaldi et al., 2012).

The concept of masculinity was a dominant feature in all of the participants' accounts throughout the entirety of their interviews, as very frequently reflected in other studies on male DA victimisation (Hogan, 2016). All participants explained how the abuse had an impact on their sense of masculinity (Lambert, 2011; Migliaccio, 2001) and how they perceived their experiences of victimisation as contradicting to their gender identity (Merrill & Wolfe, 2000; Morgan & Wells, 2016). This result is in line with evidence, which supports that widely held accounts of DA depict abuse as perpetrated by men towards women (Drijber et al., 2013). Additionally, the men's experiences indicated unwillingness to share their stories, as they were fearful of being judged as 'not men enough' (Tsui et al., 2010), given the governing social perceptions of female victimisation (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Indeed, as evidence suggests, the violence inflicted by women on men might be trivialised or considered less serious (Poorman et al., 2003; Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005) and in some cases, male victims may be mocked by the general public (Saunders, 2002), mirroring the accounts of some of the men that took part in the current study who explained that they were mocked when they contacted the authorities. The findings relating to the impacts on the participants' sense of masculinity are in line with literature, which suggests that, very frequently men feel forced to sustain socially fitting values of masculine identities (Harding & Fox, 2015) and

when these values are challenged, male victims' sense of masculinity is impacted (Migliaccio, 2001).

In terms of culture, all the men reflected on the patriarchal and traditionalist views that some cultures still hold on to, especially smaller countries and communities similar to Cyprus, and argued that these views impacted even more negatively their experiences of DA victimisation given that, as James (2010) argues, these cultures would consider male victimisation as a 'social abnormality' and there is a non-acceptance of these in such cultures.  Although the participants acknowledged the universal pain, stigma and thoughts that all victims experience, irrespective of gender and culture, they explained that being a male victim in a culture that still largely holds onto rigid views of gender roles and patriarchy (Peristanis et al., 2011), was even more challenging as they believed that people from their country would be more judgmental and unaccepting of their experiences for not meeting masculine expectations (Connell & Messerchmidt, 2005). For them, male victimisation in Cyprus was also difficult as it created more barriers in terms of seeking support because of the shame and embarrassment they experienced that was partly due to the perceived reactions from social and professional support services in that they would be humiliated and mocked, as they would be seen as 'problematic men'.

The experiences of the Cypriot male victims that took part in this study, which accounted for the cultural aspects of DA and male victimisation, largely reflected those of other male victims from different countries and by extent, cultures.  In particular, the findings of the current study were similar with the findings of studies conducted in other countries in terms of the impacts the male participants suffered on both their psychological wellbeing and sense of masculinity.  For example, the Cypriot participants

shared how the experience made them question their 'manliness' and at the same time, how the abuse minimised their sense of masculinity and made them feel marginalised due to their victimisation experiences. These impacts have been frequently reported by male victims that took part in studies conducted in other countries (e.g. Corbally, 2015; Hogan, 2016; Lambert, 2011; Migliaccio, 2001 etc.). Relating to the psychological impacts, the Cypriot participants mentioned that, amongst others, they were left feeling embarrassed, ashamed, anxious, low and depressed as a result of the abuse they suffered, feelings commonly reported by other male victims of different cultures (e.g. Jocelyn, 2011; Randle & Graham, 2011 etc.). Additionally, the participants' accounts were similar to those of other participants from different countries in terms of their experiences of seeking and receiving support. Specifically, mirroring the accounts of other male victims in different countries, the men reported that they faced a number of internal obstacles when seeking support including fear of humiliation due to not meeting conventional masculine expectations (Drijber et al., 2013; Morgan & Wells, 2016), and fear of not being believed by support services given that male victimisation is not widely spoken about so, many people are unaware of it and don't understand it (Corbally, 2015; Hogan, 2016; Migliaccio, 2001 etc.) as well as external obstacles such as services being mostly designed for female victims (Hines & Douglas, 2010; Oliffe et al., 2014). In terms of their experiences of receiving support, the Cypriot participants, as other participants in culturally different male victimisation studies, mentioned that they had both positive experiences, for example, being treated with a non-judgemental and understanding attitude (Hines & Douglas, 2010), having practical help and guidance (Hogan, 2016), receiving reassurance and validation (Flanagan et al., 2015) etc., as well as negative experiences including being re-traumatized by services that are designed to aid female victims (e.g. Hines et al., 2007; Morgan & Wells, 2016) and being mocked and their experiences being trivialized (e.g. Seelau & Seelau, 2005). The experiences of the

Cypriot male victims were also similar to those of other victims from different countries in ways that related to the progression and nature of abuse they suffered, with verbal and physical being the most frequently experienced (e.g. Drijber et al., 2013; Hines & Saudino, 2003; Hogan, 2016; James, 2010 etc.) and with both types of abuse escalating in the violent relationship whereby female perpetrators became more abusive towards their male partners, a finding frequently reported in other studies concerning male victimisation (Schumann & Valente, 2002).  As other male victims that took part in studies conducted in countries different to Cyprus (e.g. Connell, 2005; Hogan, 2016; James, 2010; Papanis, 2008; Salam et al., 2006), the male victims that participated in the current study reported that they experienced forms of abuse unique to their gender as they were accused of not meeting dominant gender role expectations and their masculinity was targeted by their female partners through humiliation and belittlement that only made the men feel further shame, embarrassment and failure.  Adding to the similarities with studies conducted in other countries, the participants of the current study reported that they employed a number of strategies to help them cope with the violence for instance, avoidance (Haeseler, 2013; Hogan, 2016 etc.), or becoming more passive, using work as distraction (e.g. Hogan, 2016; Josolyne, 2011), engaging in physical exercise (Josolyne, 2011) as well as alcohol abuse (e.g. Hines & Douglas, 2010; Hogan, 2016; McClennen et al., 2002).

In contrast to the above, some of the findings of the current study were unique to the Cypriot participants, when culture was taken into consideration and, when compared to studies conducted in other countries.   Particularly, when sharing their stories, the Cypriot participants concentrated a lot on the country's size and the culture's way of life, traditions, ideologies and perceptions regarding gender role expectations, family member roles and DA victimisation.  As mentioned previously, other male victims have

also spoken about these concepts extensively (e.g. Hines & Douglas, 2010; Hogan, 2016; Lambert, 2011 etc.) but, not in relation to their countries and their cultures and how these may impact their experiences of victimisation, how they feel about their victimisation and how these add on to their fears about the expected reactions of the public to their experiences.  All the participants that took part in the current study explained how their culture, and the perceptions held by the people sharing the same culture, had a further impact on their experience of victimisation.  The men implied that male victims tend to suffer more intensely in communities similar to Cyprus as such smaller countries tend to have more traditional and patriarchal views on gender roles leading to potential rejections of the existence of male victimisation and as a result, limited understandings and more judgemental attitudes towards male victims.

Furthermore, the male participants argued that the fears relating to their entire experience of victimisation including their fears of how other people would react to their experience, are more profound in smaller countries like Cyprus, as such countries tend to be defined by smaller, closed communities whereby the members interact frequently and insinuations travel fast hence, intensifying their experience of victimisation.  Finally, another way that the current study differs from the studies conducted in other countries, is in terms of whom the participants chose to share their experiences with. The Cypriot male participants showed a preference of sharing their experiences with professionals that worked closely with the DV organisation rather than sharing with their close social environment such as family and friends.  Contrastingly, other findings indicated that male victims showed a preference of sharing their experiences of DV with their social environment rather than professional support services and authorities (Hogan, 2016).

**Implications for counselling psychology**

The results from this study have significant implications for the profession of counselling psychology. The participants' accounts of receiving mental health support highlighted the benefits of sharing their experiences of abuse with psychologists who understood the impacts of DA, validated their experiences and were non-judgemental (Roddy, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial that counselling psychologists are aware of the distinctive issues that most male victims experience and, of male victimisation in general (Barber, 2008). Given that all participants perceived that they failed to meet cultural, social and internal expectations of masculine roles, and thus were self-critical, experiencing a non-judgemental approach by professionals was of vital importance. Counselling psychologists and mental health practitioners need to be conscious of the traumatic experience of DA for men thus, as mentioned earlier, they should endeavour to develop unconditional positive self-regard in male victims' recovery (Flanagan et al., 2015). Additionally, in line with the core objective of counselling psychology, it is important that practitioners value the subjective experiences of their clients (Cooper, 2009) given that most male victims stress the importance of not being treated with suspicion (Morgan & Wells, 2016) and of being believed.

Several participants highlighted their perceptions of being perceived as weak for being men that couldn't cope independently and who sought and received professional support and therapy as this, seemed to them, that they were failing in meeting masculine expectations (Gillon, 2008). These perceived notions may restrict male victims' engagement with counselling (Hogan, 2016). The participants' accounts stress the importance of raising awareness as to what counselling psychology is about (Hogan, 2016) and of challenging the perception that receiving mental health support is shaming

and something that men do not do.  Furthermore, most participants reported that one of the aspects that made receiving therapy beneficial was the assurance of confidentiality.  Research has demonstrated that male victims' fears, of being perceived as weak for seeking psychological support, are reduced when confidentiality is assured (Millar, 2003).  In line with this, counselling psychologists need to be able to appropriately convey confidentiality and explain its limits and boundaries for therapy.

The accounts the men provided in this study highlight that their experiences of being male victims of female perpetrated DA were traumatic and had damaging impacts on their psychological wellbeing as well as on their physical health.  In line with previous studies (Randle & Graham, 2011), the participants explained that, amongst others, they experienced suicidal ideation, PTSD and depression as a result of DA.  Therapists and psychologists working with male victims of DA should be knowledgeable of the serious impacts of DA victimisation (Campbell, 2002).  Amongst the fears the men faced when seeking professional support was their belief that such services would not or were unable to support and help them especially, in some cases, following their negative experiences of contacting other authorities such as the police.  Specifically, mirroring previous research on male victimisation, when seeking support, most participants were worried that professional support services would not take them seriously (Drijber et al., 2013), including the DA organisation, the police as well as psychologists.  The accounts of the men demonstrate the significance of increasing awareness amongst men, that have been victims of DA, as to how professional services are able to offer support and in particular, of how mental health services and psychologists can support them.  As research on female victimisation illustrates, a stable predictor of support seeking behaviours in female victims are the levels of education on the matter and the enhanced

awareness of how to utilise support services and how these services can help them with their traumatic experiences (Kaukinen, Meyer & Akers, 2013).

Moreover, given the accounts that the participants provided in terms of the impacts of abuse on their psychological wellbeing, and given the influence of this on barriers to seeking professional support, counselling psychologists need to be mindful of the consequences that principles and assumptions of masculine identities and roles may have on therapy (Hogan et al., 2012) and male victims.  As mentioned previously in the literature review, research has established that perceptions of DA are largely in line with gender role stereotypes (Seelau & Seelau, 2005) and hence, assumptions of masculine roles and identities.  The sex of the victim and perpetrator impacts perceptions of DV (Poorman et al., 2003) in a way that may have damaging effects on how the case is treated by the public and criminal justice system but also, on the support that male victims may receive by mental health practitioners, such as psychologists.  For instance, male victims of DA may come across social workers, therapists, psychologists and so on who deem their cases and experiences of DV as less serious and their accounts as not that believable (Poorman et al., 2003).  Evidence has suggested that male victims are often minimised, treated with disbelief and suspicion and have, in some circumstances, been accused of being the perpetrators of DV instead of victims (Hines et al., 2007), so the possibility of receiving less support may hinder male victims from contacting a psychologist or counsellor for support (Poorman et al., 2003). Therefore, psychologists should be concerned about the possibility that men who have been victims of DV may be treated inequitably (Seelau & Seelau, 2005) and so, efforts should be made to increase awareness that will assist in educating the public and more specifically, primary contact officials such as therapists and psychologists about the realities of DA (Seelau et al., 2003) and the damaging effects DA can have on all victims, irrespective of their gender (Seelau & Seelau, 2005).  In line with this, training specific to male victimisation

and gender norms, that is tailored to the needs of male victims in order to better support them, needs to be developed and delivered to therapists and counselling psychologists. The more training we receive and the more we increase our understanding and awareness of perceptions on DV, the more we can accomplish in order to provide fair and equal treatment to all DV cases.

As evidence importantly demonstrates, models of treatment offered to male victims should take into account gender identity and the role of masculinity (Barber, 2008).  The participants reported feeling relieved when they were assured that men could be victims of female perpetrated DV and, when they realised that they were not 'the only abused men in Cyprus'.  This was due to the fact that they understood that the organisation, and psychologists they visited, were safe spaces for them to challenge and question gender norms hence, reducing their feelings of embarrassment and shame regarding their victimisation and masculinity (Randle & Graham, 2011).  Consequently, therapists, psychologists and generally support services, need to be mindful of the prevailing cultural and social expectations regarding masculine identities and roles, and the related feelings of embarrassment and shame men may experience if they believe thay have failed to meet these expectations.  This, has been argued to be one of the most significant barriers for men to seeking support for their DA victimisation (Tsui et al., 2010).

Research has also highlighted the resistance some men face to the status of being a 'victim' (Zverina et al., 2011).  As a result, counselling psychologists and mental health practitioners should receive training that addresses the probable resistance to the victim label (Migliaccio, 2001).   Furthermore, practitioners need to be aware of the possible challenge of integrating masculine expectations and perceptions (Connell, 2005) with

the paradoxical experience of being a man that has been abused by his female partner (Yarrow & Churchill, 2009).  Counselling Psychologists need to develop creative ways whereby masculinity and gender roles are integrated within their work with male victims of DV thus, helping them in establishing a masculine identity that is healthy on both personal and social levels (Allen-Collinson, 2009).

Additionally, the participants reported that many people, including authorities, are unaware of the fact that men can be victims of DV perpetrated by women, especially in countries like Cyprus, as they specifically mentioned.  Therefore, services and mental health practitioners, such as counsellors and psychologists, need to be aware of this traumatic experience that some men may go through and of the nature of DV against male victims.  As some of the men explained, they suffered forms of violence, at the hands of their female partners, that were specific to their gender.  For example, their female partners, on numerous occasions, endeavoured to minimise their masculine identities as a type of emotional abuse (Allen-Collinson, 2009).  Its is vital that professionals and psychologists working with male victims, are knowledgeable on the various violence tactics used by abuse perpetrators in order to support victims in identifying and escaping such forms of abuse and control (Rhodes & McKenzie, 1999).  It would also be beneficial for counselling psychologists working with female-perpetrated DA male victims, to understand the complexity of their accounts (Corbally, 2015).  As Merrill & Wolfe (2000) suggest, an understanding and knowledge regarding DV may be gained by listening to male victims' narratives that will enable competent mental health practice to develop.

Finally, the findings of the current research provide significant insights into male victims' experiences of DV perpetrated by female partners, which have the capacity to increase

132

our knowledge of how to better support male victims (Randle & Graham, 2011). It is hoped that the accounts of the men that took part in this study as well as the results of the research, will aid understanding and awareness of female perpetrated male victimisation by offering empirical evidence aimed to enhance professional psychological interventions.

**Limitations of current study and suggestions for future research**

Although this research project has offered a range of detailed and rich material regarding the experiences of male victims of DV, by also uniquely taking into account the cultural element of victimisation, recognition is necessary with regards to its limitations and possible directions for future research.

Firstly, it is fundamental to take into account that, as mentioned previously, although the findings of this research largely reflected those of studies conducted in other countries (e.g. Chaudhuri, 2012; Drijber et l., 2013; Hines et al., 2007; Hogan, 2016; Randle & Graham, 2011 etc.), minor differences still existed therefore, a limited amount of the current findings might not be transferable to other male victims of DV who have a different cultural background, given the participants' specific demographic information (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, it is vital to consider that the aim of this study was to explore and gain an understanding into the experiences of Cypriot male victims of DA and gather rich and in-depth data rather than transfer the findings and make claims about other cultures. Additionally, although this research project pioneered in investigating male DA victimisation by taking into account the cultural background of the participants, and given the need for such explorations into the issue (Randle & Graham, 2011), all participants were of the same culture, i.e. Cypriot, which may potentially limit a small number of claims that can be made regarding the difference in the meaning of

abuse and the experience of male victimisation between cultures.  At the same time, it is important to clarify that this study sought to explore this specific cultural background because of the enforced traditional and patriarchal gender roles (Peristanis et al., 2011) and how these related to the participants' experience of male DA victimisation. Nevertheless, future research should continue to explore the relationship between culture and male DA victimisation in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impacts of culture and the different notions each culture holds regarding DA and gender role expectations that will in turn, aid in raising awareness of the phenomenon as well as in being able to better support male victims.  Moreover, future research can address the possible restrictions of claims that can be made relating to male DA victimisation and culture by exploring the experiences of male victims that are of different cultural backgrounds and, by specifically taking into account the cultural aspect of male victimisation for each of the participants.  In other words, future research should aim to examine male victimisation across cultures and whether this experience is different for men given their cultural background.  As Randle and Graham (2011) argue, further research should investigate male victimisation in ethnic minority populations and, as mentioned throughout, in different cultures given that abuse has a different meaning both between and within cultures (Jewkes, 2002; Mann & Takyi, 2009).

Adding to the above, some evidence suggests that, on a number of occasions, men find it very difficult to be categorised as 'victims' of DV (Crocker & Major, 1989) due to not wanting to be judged as 'not men enough' (Migliaccio, 2001) that might in turn, have an impact on the data collected from the interview process (Tsui et al., 2010). Consequently, researchers investigating male victimisation need to be considerate of their use of language in terms of phrasing questions and referring to participants hence,

it may be best that the term 'survivor' replaces the term 'victim' (Donovan & Hester, 2010).

Authors frequently stress the importance of conducting more research in order to further the understanding of male victimisation (Randle & Graham, 2011). The results of the current study shed light on the experiences of male victims and the different difficulties they face as well as on the specific cultural experience of male victimisation. Given that research on female-perpetrated male DA victimisation is in its early days (Douglas & Hines, 2010), further studies need to be conducted in order to advance theory and practice on the matter. More specifically, it is of vital importance that practitioners and professionals working with male victims improve their ability to better support men that have been victims of DA (Hogan et al., 2012).

Finally, in line with other studies on male victimisation (e.g. Douglas & Hines, 2010; Randle & Graham, 2011 etc.), masculinity had a central role in this research. Therefore, given the impacts of DA on masculinity, the unique to male victims difficulties related to DV and their gender identities as well as the strong relationship between widely held social perceptions and masculine expectations (Seelau & Seelau, 2005), further research needs to be conducted in order to increase understanding on these issues. This research may lead to more campaigns on DV perpetrated against men and the implications of this on male victims, to the creation of government policies specific for male victims and most importantly, to increasing the awareness of scholars as well as of the public on male victimisation in order to help reduce the stigma that surrounds this issue.

## Concluding comments

This research project has given Cypriot male victims of female-perpetrated DV the opportunity to voice their experiences and share what it meant for them to be male victims of DA and of a specific cultural background, what the impacts of this abuse were on their physical and mental health and what barriers they faced in terms of seeking support.  It is hoped that this research has helped to make male victims of abuse more visible as male victimisation is a serious and valid issue.  Finally, it is also hoped that researchers and clinicians continue to make male victimisation visible so that male victims, who have described their experiences of abuse as traumatic, can receive the support, validation and understanding that they deserve.

**References**

Addis, M. E., & Mahalik, J. R. (2003). Men, masculinity, and the contexts of help seeking. *American Psychologist, 58*(1), 5.

Afifi, T. O., MacMillan, H., Cox, B. J., Asmundson, G. J., Stein, M. B., & Sareen, J. (2009). Mental health correlates of intimate partner violence in marital relationships in a nationally representative sample of males and females. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 24*(8), 1398-1417.

Ahmed, A., Aldén, L., & Hammarstedt, M. (2013). Perceptions of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual domestic violence among undergraduates in sweden. International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCV), 7(2), 249-260.

Alhabib, S., Nur, U., & Jones, R. (2010). Domestic violence against women: Systematic review of prevalence studies. *Journal of Family Violence, 25*(4), 369-382.

Allen-Collinson, J. (2009). A marked man: Female-perpetrated intimate partner abuse. *International Journal of Men's Health, 8*(1), 22.

Apostolidou, M., Mavrikiou, P., & Parlaris, S. (2014). *Extent, frequency, types and impacts of domestic abuse in Cyprus*. Nicosia: Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Abuse in the Family.

Archer, J. (2000). Sex differences in aggression between heterosexual partners: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 126*(5), 651.

Barber, C. F. (2008). Domestic violence against men. *Nursing Standard, 22*(51), 35.

Barnes, R. (2013). "I'm over it": Survivor narratives after woman-to-woman partner abuse. *Partner Abuse, 4*(3), 380-398.

Berger, J. L., Addis, M. E., Green, J. D., Mackowiak, C., & Goldberg, V. (2013). Men's reactions to mental health labels, forms of help-seeking, and sources of help-seeking advice. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 14*(4), 433.

Bograd, M. (1999). Strengthening domestic violence theories: Intersections of race, class, sexual orientation, and gender. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 25*(3), 275-289.

BPS. (2014). Code of Human Research Ethics. Retrieved from: https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-code-human-research-ethics-2nd-edition-2014

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners.* London: Sage.

British Home Office (2007). 'Better Protection for Domestic Violence Victims.' [online] Last visited 13th Oct 2017 at www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Capaldi, D. M., Knoble, N. B., Shortt, J. W., & Kim, H. K. (2012). A systematic review of risk factors for intimate partner violence. *Partner Abuse, 3*(2), 231-280.

Carmo, R., Grams, A., & Magalhaes, T. (2011). Men as victims of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine, 18*(8), 355-359.

Carney, M., Buttell, F., & Dutton, D. (2007). Women who perpetrate intimate partner violence: A review of the literature with recommendations for treatment. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 12*(1), 108-115.

Chamberlain, L. B. (2008). *The amazing brain: Trauma and the potential for healing*. Philadelphia: PA.

Chaudhuri, T. (2012). Patterns of male victimisation in intimate relationships: A pilot comparison of academic and media reports. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 20*(1), 57-72.

Client screening to identify domestic violence victimisation. (2013). Retrieved from: https://www.mnbar.org/docs/default-source/sections/client-screening-to-identify-domestic-violence-victimisation.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Coker, A. L., Davis, K. E., Arias, I., Desai, S., Sanderson, M., Brandt, H. M., & Smith, P. H. (2002). Physical and mental health effects of intimate partner violence for men and women. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 23*(4), 260-268.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 829-859.

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Policy Press.

Connolly, C., Huzurbazar, S., & Routh-McGee, T. (2000). Multiple parties in domestic violence situations and arrest. Journal of Criminal Justice, 28(3), 181-188.

Cook, P. W. (2009). *Abused men: The hidden side of domestic violence*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing.

Cooper, M. (2009). Welcoming the other: Actualising the humanistic ethic at the core of counselling psychology practice. *Counselling Psychology Review-British Psychological Society, 24*(4).

Corbally, M. (2015). Accounting for intimate partner violence: A biographical analysis of

    narrative strategies used by men experiencing IPV from their female

    partners. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 30*(17), 3112-3132.

Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective

    properties of stigma. *Psychological Review, 96*(4), 608.

Dempsey, B. (2013). Men's experience of domestic abuse in Scotland. Edinburgh:

    Abused Men in Scotland (AMIS).

Dick, G. (2004). Men's relationships with their fathers: Comparing men who batter

    women with non-violent men. *Journal of Emotional Abuse, 4*(1), 61-84.

Dobash, R. P., & Dobash, R. E. (2001). Violence against women: A review of recent anglo-

    american research. *Journal of Conflict and Violence Research, 3*(2), 5-22.

Dobash, R. P., & Dobash, R. E. (2004). Women's violence to men in intimate

    relationships: Working on a puzzle. *British Journal of Criminology, 44*(3), 324-349.

Donovan, C., & Hester, M. (2010). 'I hate the word "victim"': An exploration of

    recognition of domestic violence in same sex relationships. *Social Policy and*

    *Society, 9*(2), 279-289.

Drijber, B. C., Reijnders, U. J., & Ceelen, M. (2013). Male victims of domestic

    violence. *Journal of Family Violence, 28*(2), 173-178.

Dunn, P. (2012). Men as victims: "Victim" identities, gay identities, and

    masculinities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 27*(17), 3442-3467.

Durfee, A. (2011). "I'm not a victim, She's an abuser" masculinity, victimisation, and

protection orders. *Gender & Society, 25*(3), 316-334.

Dutton, D. G. (2007). Female intimate partner violence and developmental trajectories

of abusive females. *International Journal of Men's Health, 6*(1), 54.

Eatough, V., Smith, J. A., & Shaw, R. (2008). Women, anger, and aggression: An

interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23*(12),

1767-1799.

Eckstein, J. J. (2011). Reasons for staying in intimately violent relationships: Comparisons

of men and women and messages communicated to self and others. *Journal of

Family Violence, 26*(1), 21-30.

Edwards, L., & Roces, M. (2006). *Women's suffrage in Asia: Gender, nationalism and

democracy* Routledge.

Esquivel-Santoveña, E. E., & Dixon, L. (2012). Investigating the true rate of physical

intimate partner violence: A review of nationally representative surveys. *Aggression

and Violent Behavior, 17*(3), 208-219.

Fanslow, J. L., & Robinson, E. M. (2010). Help-seeking behaviors and reasons for help

seeking reported by a representative sample of women victims of intimate partner

violence in New Zealand. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25*(5), 929-951.

Fenstermaker, S., & West, C. (2002). *Doing gender, doing difference: Inequality, power,

and institutional change* Psychology Press.

Flanagan, S., Patterson, T. G., Hume, I. R., & Joseph, S. (2015). A longitudinal

investigation of the relationship between unconditional positive self-regard and

posttraumatic growth. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies, 14*(3), 191-200.

Flynn, C. P. (1990). Relationship violence by women: Issues and implications. *Family Relations,* 194-198.

Gadd, D., Farrall, S., Dallimore, D., & Lombard, N. (2003). Equal victims or the usual suspects? making sense of domestic abuse against men. *International Review of Victimology, 10*(2), 95-116.

George, M. J. (2002). Skimmington revisited. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 10*(2), 111-127.

Gillon, E. (2008). Men, masculinity and person-centered therapy. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies, 7*(2).

Goldner, V. (1998). The treatment of violence and victimisation in intimate relationships. *Family Process, 37*(3), 263-286.

Haeseler, L. A. (2013). Women's coping experiences in the spectrum of domestic violence abuse. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 10*(1), 33-43.

Hagene, T. (2010). The role of love in the reproduction of gender asymmetries: A case from post-revolutionary nicaragua. *Revista Europea De Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe/European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies,* 27-45.

Hamby, S. L. (2005). Measuring gender differences in partner violence: Implications from research on other forms of violent and socially undesirable behavior. *Sex Roles, 52*(12), 725-742.

Hamilton, A. B., & Goeders, N. E. (2010). Violence perpetrated by women who use methamphetamine. *Journal of Substance use, 15*(5), 313-329.

Harding, C., & Fox, C. (2015). It's not about "Freudian couches and personality changing drugs" an investigation into men's mental health help-seeking enablers. *American Journal of Men's Health, 9*(6), 451-463.

Hay, I. (2000). Qualitative research methods in human geography. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Hendy, H. M., Eggen, D., Gustitus, C., McLeod, K. C., & Ng, P. (2003). Decision to leave scale: Perceived reasons to stay in or leave violent relationships. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 27*(2), 162-173.

Hester, M. (2013). Who does what to whom? gender and domestic violence perpetrators in English police records. *European Journal of Criminology, 10*(5), 623-637.

Hines, D. A. (2007). Posttraumatic stress symptoms among men who sustain partner violence: An international multisite study of university students. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 8*(4), 225.

Hines, D. A., Brown, J., & Dunning, E. (2007). Characteristics of callers to the domestic abuse helpline for men. *Journal of Family Violence, 22*(2), 63-72.

Hines, D. A., & Malley-Morrison, K. (2001). Psychological effects of partner abuse against men: A neglected research area. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 2*(2), 75.

Hines, D. A., & Saudino, K. J. (2003). Gender differences in psychological, physical, and sexual aggression among college students using the revised conflict tactics scales. *Violence and Victims, 18*(2), 197-217.

Hines, D. A., & Douglas, E. M. (2010). A closer look at men who sustain intimate terrorism by women. *Partner Abuse, 1*(3), 286-313.

Hogan, K. F., Hegarty, J. R., Ward, T., & Dodd, L. J. (2012). Counsellors' experiences of working with male victims of female-perpetrated domestic abuse. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 12*(1), 44-52.

Hogan, K. *Men's experiences of female-perpetrated intimate partner violence: A qualitative exploration* Retrieved from: http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/28618/

Hydén, M. (1999). The world of the fearful: Battered Women's narratives of leaving abusive husbands. *Feminism & Psychology, 9*(4), 449-469.

Jacobson, N. S., & Gottman, J. M. (1998). *Anatomy of a violent relationship*. New York: Sussex Publishers, Inc.

James, K. (2010). Domestic violence within refugee families: Intersecting patriarchal culture and the refugee experience. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 31*(3), 275-284.

Jewkes, R. (2002). Intimate partner violence: Causes and prevention. *The Lancet, 359*(9315), 1423-1429.

Johnson, M. P. (2006). Conflict and control: Gender symmetry and asymmetry in domestic violence. *Violence Against Women, 12*(11), 1003-1018.

Josolyn, S. (2011). Men's experiences of violence and abuse from a female intimate partner: power masculinity and institutional systems (Doctoral dissertation, University of East London).

Kaili, C., & Pavlou, S. (2010). *REACT to domestic violence: Building a support system for victims of domestci violence*. Nicosia: Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies.

Kaukinen, C. E., Meyer, S., & Akers, C. (2013). Status compatibility and help-seeking behaviors among female intimate partner violence victims. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 28(3), 577-601.

Kaura, S. A., & Lohman, B. J. (2007). Dating violence victimisation, relationship satisfaction, mental health problems, and acceptability of violence: A comparison of men and women. *Journal of Family Violence, 22*(6), 367-381.

Kearney, M. H. (2001). Enduring love: A grounded formal theory of women's experience of domestic violence. *Research in Nursing & Health, 24*(4), 270-282.

Keeling, J., & Fisher, C. (2012). Women's early relational experiences that lead to domestic violence. *Qualitative Health Research, 22*(11), 1559-1567.

Kimmel, M. S. (2002). "Gender symmetry" in domestic violence: A substantive and methodological research review. *Violence Against Women, 8*(11), 1332-1363.

Lambert, K. (2011). Broken men break the silence. (Dissertation, Citeseer). Retrieved from: http://www.mankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Broken-Men-Break-The-Silence-Katie-Lam.pdf

Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2011). Meaning in life and posttraumatic growth. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 16*(2), 150-159.

Lyon, E., Bradshaw, J., & Menard, A. (2011). *Meeting survivors' needs through non-residential domestic violence services & supports: Results of a multi-state study.* School of Social Work, University of Connecticut.

Mankind Initiative (2008) 'The Condition of Men in the UK – 2007/08 Domestic Abuse Research and Statistics.' [online] Last visited 4th March 2018 at www.mankind.org.uk.

Mann, J. R., & Takyi, B. K. (2009). Autonomy, dependence or culture: Examining the impact of resources and socio-cultural processes on attitudes towards intimate partner violence in ghana, africa. *Journal of Family Violence, 24*(5), 323-335.

McCart, M. R., Smith, D. W., & Sawyer, G. K. (2010). Help seeking among victims of crime: A review of the empirical literature. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 23*(2), 198-206.

McClennen, J. C. (2005). Domestic violence between same-gender partners: Recent findings and future research. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 20*(2), 149-154.

McClennen, J. C., Summers, A. B., & Vaughan, C. (2002). Gay men's domestic violence: Dynamics, help-seeking behaviors, and correlates. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 14*(1), 23-49.

McCoy, K. (2016). Rape of Adult Males and Psychological Distress: A Systematic Review (Doctoral dissertation, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology).

Merrill, G. S., & Wolfe, V. A. (2000). Battered gay men: An exploration of abuse, help seeking, and why they stay. *Journal of Homosexuality, 39*(2), 1-30.

Migliaccio, T. A. (2001). Marginalizing the battered male. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 9*(2), 205-226.

Mills, T. (1984). Victimisation and self-esteem: On equating husband abuse and wife abuse. *Victimology, 9*(2), 254-261.

Mills, T. J., Avegno, J. L., & Haydel, M. J. (2006). Male victims of partner violence: Prevalence and accuracy of screening tools. *The Journal of Emergency Medicine, 31*(4), 447-452.

Morgan, W., & Wells, M. (2016). 'It's deemed unmanly': Men's experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV). *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology, 27*(3), 404-418.

Morse, B. J. (1995). Beyond the conflict tactics scale: Assessing gender differences in partner violence. *Violence and Victims, 10*(4), 251.

Muller, H. J., Desmarais, S. L., & Hamel, J. M. (2009). Do judicial responses to restraining order requests discriminate against male victims of domestic violence? *Journal of Family Violence, 24*(8), 625-637.

Nam, S. K., Chu, H. J., Lee, M. K., Lee, J. H., Kim, N., & Lee, S. M. (2010). A meta-analysis of gender differences in attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. *Journal of American College Health, 59*(2), 110-116.

Oliffe, J. L., Han, C., Maria, E. S., Lohan, M., Howard, T., Stewart, D. E., & MacMillan, H. (2014). Gay men and intimate partner violence: A gender analysis. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 36*(4), 564-579.

Osborne, S., Lau, I., Britton, A., & Smith, K. (2012). Homicides, firearm offences and intimate violence 2010/11: Supplementary volume 2 to crime in England and Wales 2010/11. *London: Home Office.*

Pagelow, M. D. (1992). Adult victims of domestic violence: Battered women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 7*(1), 87-120.

Palin-Davies, S. (2006). Male victims of female-perpetrated domestic violence. *Social Work Monographs, 221.*

Papanis, E. (2008). Male abuse: It happens in our country. Retrieved from: http://www.iatronet.gr/eidiseis-nea/epistimi-zwi/news/4719/kakopoiisi-andrwn-symvainei-kai-sti-xwra-mas.html

Pattavina, A., Hirschel, D., Buzawa, E., Faggiani, D., & Bentley, H. (2007). A comparison of the police response to heterosexual versus same-sex intimate partner violence. *Violence Against Women, 13*(4), 374-394.

Polykarpou, A. (2017). Domestic violence is reaching its peak in cyprus. Retrieved from: https://www.offsite.com.cy/articles/eidiseis/topika/221378-i-endooikogeneiaki-via-aggizei-kokkino-stin-kypro-pinakes

Poorman, P. B., Seelau, E. P., & Seelau, S. M. (2003). Perceptions of domestic abuse in same-sex relationships and implications for criminal justice and mental health responses. Violence and Victims, 18(6), 659.

Rabionet, S. E. (2011). How I learned to design and conduct semi-structured interviews: An ongoing and continuous journey. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(2), 563.

Randle, A. A., & Graham, C. A. (2011). A review of the evidence on the effects of intimate partner violence on men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 12*(2), 97.

Reed, G. L., & Enright, R. D. (2006). The effects of forgiveness therapy on depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress for women after spousal emotional abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 74*(5), 920.

Rhodes, N. R., & McKenzie, E. B. (1998). Why do battered women stay?: Three decades of research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 3*(4), 391-406.

Ristock, J. (2012). *No more secrets: Violence in lesbian relationships.* London: Routledge.

Roddy, J. K. (2013). Client perspectives: The therapeutic challenge of domestic violence counselling–a pilot study. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 13*(1), 53-60.

Sabina, C., & Tindale, R. S. (2008). Abuse characteristics and coping resources as predictors of problem-focused coping strategies among battered women. *Violence Against Women, 14*(4), 437-456.

Salam, M. A., Alim, M. A., & Noguchi, T. (2006). Spousal abuse against women and its consequences on reproductive health: A study in the urban slums in bangladesh. *Maternal and Child Health Journal, 10*(1), 83-94.

Sarantakos, S. (1999). Husband abuse: Fact or fiction? *Australian Journal of Social Issues, 34*(3).

Saunders, D. G. (2002). Are physical assaults by wives and girlfriends a major social problem? A review of the literature. *Violence Against Women, 8*(12), 1424-1448.

Schumann, L., & Valente, S. M. (2002). Evaluating intimate partner violence. *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, 14*(11), 505-516.

Seelau, E. P., Seelau, S. M., & Poorman, P. B. (2003). Gender and role‐based perceptions of domestic abuse: Does sexual orientation matter? Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 21(2), 199-214.

Seelau, S. M., & Seelau, E. P. (2005). Gender-role stereotypes and perceptions of heterosexual, gay and lesbian domestic violence. Journal of Family Violence, 20(6), 363.

Shaw, R. (2001). Why use interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology? *Health Psychology Update, 10*, 48-52.

Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phoneomological analysis: Theory, method and research.* London: Sage.

Smith, J. A. (2011). Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Health Psychology Review, 5*(1), 9-27.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Osborn, M. (1997). Interpretative phenomenological analysis and the psychology of health and illness. *Material Discourses of Health and Illness, ,* 68-91.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Osborn, M. (1997). Interpretative phenomenological analysis and the psychology of health and illness. *Material Discourses of Health and Illness, ,* 68-91.

Stamp, G. H., & Sabourin, T. C. (1995). Accounting for violence: An analysis of male

    spousal abuse narratives. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 23*(4), 284-

    307.

Steinmetz, S. K. (1977). The battered husband syndrome. *Victimology, 2*(3-4), 499-509.

Swan, S. C., Gambone, L. J., Caldwell, J. E., Sullivan, T. P., & Snow, D. L. (2008). A review

    of research on women's use of violence with male intimate partners. *Violence and*

    *Victims, 23*(3), 301-314.

Sylaska, K. M., & Edwards, K. M. (2014). Disclosure of intimate partner violence to

    informal social support network members: A review of the literature. *Trauma,*

    *Violence, & Abuse, 15*(1), 3-21.

Tsui, V., Cheung, M., & Leung, P. (2010). Help-seeking among male victims of partner

    abuse: Men's hard times. *Journal of Community Psychology, 38*(6), 769-780.

Vogel, D., Heimerdinger-Edwards, S., Hammer, J., & Hubbard, A. (2011). Boys don't cry":

    Examination of the links between masculine norms and help-seeking attitudes for

    men from diverse cultural backgrounds. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58*(3),

    368-382.

Walby, S., & Allen, J. (2004). *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings*

    *from the British Crime Survey.* Home Office.

Williams, J. R., Ghandour, R. M., & Kub, J. E. (2008). Female perpetration of violence in

    heterosexual intimate relationships: Adolescence through adulthood. *Trauma,*

    *Violence, & Abuse, 9*(4), 227-249.

World Health Organisation. (2012). Understanding and addressing violence against

women. Retrieved from:

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77433/1/WHO_RHR_12.35_eng.pdf

World Health Organisation. (2013).Global and regional estimates of violence against

women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner

violence. Retrieved from:

http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf

Xu, X., Zhu, F., O'Campo, P., Koenig, M. A., Mock, V., & Campbell, J. (2005). Prevalence of

and risk factors for intimate partner violence in china. *American Journal of Public*

*Health, 95*(1), 78-85.

Yarrow, C., & Churchill, S. (2009). Counsellors' and psychologists' experience of working

with male survivors of sexual trauma: A pilot study. *Counselling Psychology*

*Quarterly, 22*(2), 267-277.

Zverina, M., Stam, H. J., & Babins-Wagner, R. (2011). Managing victim status in group

therapy for men: A discourse analysis. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 26*(14),

2834-2855.

**<u>Appendices</u>**

**Appendix 1:** Journal article - redacted

**Appendix 2:** Interview schedule

**Appendix 3:** Participant information sheet

**Appendix 4:** Participant consent form

**Appendix 5:** Overview table of superordinate and subordinate themes

**Appendix 6:** Example of development of themes from transcript extract

**Appendix 2: Interview Schedule**

How long have you attended the service?

• How did it feel to seek support?

• Could you tell me more about whether there was anything that delayed you seeking support? Made seeking support difficult or challenging in a way?

• Did you lean on others or seek alternative sources of support before attending the service?

What kind of support do you receive?

What made you come forward for help?

When did you start realizing that your partner was abusive?

• Can you tell me a bit more about the relationship?

Were you able to talk to friends/family about this?

• If so, at what point did you decide to tell them? How did this happen? (Was it planned/spontaneous?)

    ☐  If yes what were their reactions?

    ☐  If you were not able to do this, can you tell me why not and whether anything stopped you sharing your experiences?

What is your understanding of the difficulties in your relationship and why they occur?

• What do you think your role is in the arguments?

• How do you see the responsibility for the arguments?

• How do you manage the arguments once they start?

What is your experience of abuse as a man?

• What sort of behaviours do you see as being abusive?

• What advice would you give to other men in an abusive relationship?

• Looking back on your relationship could you tell me about anything that you would have done differently?

• Looking to the future, how do you think your relationship will progress?

• Do you think it is different for men as victims compared to women?

What do you believe are the perceptions Cypriots have on male victimisation?

What has been your experience as a Cypriot male victim of domestic violence?

- Do you think it is the same for all men, irrespective of their culture/ethnicity?

- Or is there anything specific about being Cypriot?

**Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet**



**Information Sheet**

**Study title:** An exploration into the experiences of Cypriot male victims of domestic violence; An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.

You are being invited to consider taking part in a research study being undertaken by Eva Mikaela Christofi, investigating the experiences of Cypriot male victims of domestic violence. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

**Background and Purpose of study**:

In the UK, Domestic violence is 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 or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality' (Home Office, 2007). The most prevalent psychological consequences of domestic violence are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Howard, Trevillion & Davies, 2010). In addition, domestic abuse is closely linked to social dysfunction, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, substance misuse, anxiety, panic disorders etc. (Valpied & Hegarty, 2015). The psychological consequences of domestic abuse continue for a long time after the end of the experience of domestic abuse (Campbell, 2002). However, most of the studies concentrate on the impact of domestic violence on female victims. As a result, awareness and understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on male victims is limited given that this population has received little research attention and even less attention in countries like Cyprus. As a result, the aim

of this study is to collect data regarding the experiences of Cypriot male victims of domestic violence.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are a Cypriot male victim of domestic violence. You have also expressed your interest and willingness to participate in this study.

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be giving this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.  If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw from the study up to March 2017 given that at that point the data will have been written up into a report and submitted to the University of the West of England to be examined. You do not have to give a reason for withdrawing or for deciding to not take part.

**What will happen to me if I take part and what will I have to do?**

You will take part in a semi-structured interview of up to an hour in which you will be asked questions of your experience of being a Cypriot male victim of domestic violence. This interview will take place at the offices of the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO) in Nicosia, Cyprus.  The questions will be asked in English and the interview will be audio recorded.  You will have to answer the questions you are going to be asked and share your experience.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

The only cases I might need to disclose any information and break confidentiality would be if I am concerned about your safety or anyone else's safety, if there is evidence of a current criminal offence or if a professional misconduct is disclosed.  In this case, I will discuss it with you first and then have a discussion with my supervisor, Dr Toni Dicaccavo.

**What might be the benefits of taking part?**

I am hoping that a possible benefit of taking part in this study would be that you might be able to voice your own experience and this could possibly be validating for you.  Also, that you will be heard and understood which might not have been your experience from many people so far. I am also hoping that the research will lead to a greater awareness of domestic violence as an issue for male as well as female victims.

**What if I become distressed after the interview and what if something goes wrong?**

If you become distressed these are the places that you can contact for counseling support. Firstly, I will provide you with the contact details of a counseling service.

Secondly, I will give you the Find a Therapist website of the Cypriot Association of Psychology. Finally, if something goes wrong or if you have any concerns about the study itself or how am I conducting it, you will be able to contact my supervisor as I will give you her contact details.

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Yes, your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Everything you say during the interview process will be kept confidential. Any identifying information will not be recorded and any electronic forms of recording and transcripts will be kept in an encrypted filed on a password-protected laptop in a locked cabinet at my home. Nevertheless, the data might be either heard or seen by my supervisors too.  Also, your name will be coded so that it does not appear on the tape recording or the transcript of your recording which both will be kept in a safe place. The tape recording and transcript will be destroyed/deleted up to three years after I graduate (October 2017) in case of any publications etc.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the research study will be reported in my doctoral dissertation/thesis. Furthermore, the results that will be included in the report might be submitted for publication.  Finally, the results might also be included in proceedings of conference presentations.  You will not be identified in any report or possible publication.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

As mentioned earlier, my name is Eva Mikaela Christofi and I am Counseling Psychology Doctoral student at the University of the West of England.


**Contact for further Information**

 **Eva Michaella Christofi**

Email: eva2.christofi@live.uwe.ac.uk

Tel: 07928613088

**Dr Toni Dicaccavo (supervisor)**

Email: toni.dicaccavo@uwe.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)117 32 82181


One copy of the Information Sheet and signed consent to be retained by the participant.

**Thank you for your time and for taking part in the study!**

Date:

**Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form**

University of the West of England BRISTOL

**Consent Form for An exploration into the experiences of Cypriot male victims of domestic violence; An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.**

| *Please tick the appropriate boxes* | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| **Taking Part** | | |
| I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY. | ☐ | ☐ |
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. | ☐ | ☐ |
| I understand that the aim of this study is to collect data regarding the experiences of Cypriot male victims of domestic violence. | ☐ | ☐ |
| I understand that I have been chosen because I are a Cypriot male victim of domestic violence who has expressed my interest and willingness to participate in this study. | ☐ | ☐ |
| I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio) ∗. | ☐ | ☐ |
| I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study up to March 2017 and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part ∗∗. | ☐ | ☐ |
| I understand that if I become distressed I will be provided with the contact details of places that I can contact for counseling support. | ☐ | ☐ |

I understand that if something goes wrong or if I have any concerns about the study itself ☐ ☐
or how the researcher is conducting it, I will be able to contact their supervisor.

I understand that the person conducting this research is the doctoral student who is also ☐ ☐
the researcher (Eva Mikaela Christofi) and that others that are associated with the
research are her supervisor (Dr Toni Dicaccavo) and her second supervisor (Dr Nikki
Heyfield).

**Use of the information I provide for this project only**

I understand that my participation in this study will be kept confidential and any ☐ ☐
identifying information will not be recorded.

I understand that the data might be either heard or seen by the supervisors involved in
this study. ☐ ☐

I understand that the results of the research study will be reported in the researcher's ☐ ☐
doctoral dissertation/thesis ***.

**Use of the information I provide beyond this project**

I agree for the data I provide to be included in a report that might be submitted for ☐ ☐
publication and that I will not be identified in any report or possible publication.

I agree for the data I provide to be included in possible proceedings of conference ☐ ☐
presentations and that I will not be identified in this.

_____ _____

Name of participant   [printed]     Signature         Date

_____

Researcher            [printed]         Signature                    Date

Project contact details for further information:  Names, phone, email addresses, etc.

Notes:

       ∗ Any identifying information will not be recorded and any electronic forms of recording and transcripts will be kept in an encrypted filed on a password-protected laptop in a locked cabinet at researcher's home.

       ∗∗ If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw from the study up to March 2017 given that at that point the data will have been written up into a report and submitted to the University of the West of England to be examined.

       ∗∗∗ The tape recording and transcript will be destroyed/deleted up to three years after I graduate in case of any publications etc.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Superordinate theme | **1. Failed Men – The experience of being a male victim** | |
| Subordinate themes | **1.1 The man after the abuse – Impact of abuse on masculinity** | **1.2 Cultural experience of male victimisation** |
| Examples of data | "I already felt less of a man" (G) | "My experience of a male victim that is Cypriot is that it made everything more erm… challenging and that erm.. it made everything more intense for me the whole experience and I felt more criticised by other people" (A) |
| Superordinate theme | **2. Living with the abuse – Escapes from the abuse** | |
| Examples of data | " Something had helped me through this difficult period of my life was my music" (G) | |
| Subordinate themes | **2.1 Responsibility and reasons for the abuse** | **2.2 The deceitful perpetrator – Progression and nature of the abuse** |
| Examples of data | "I think I was responsible when I got angry or frustrated because erm…it made things worse" (A) | "I never realised that she was abusive, she was well mannered before we got married" (G) |
| Superordinate theme | **3. Barriers to seeking support** | |
| Examples of Data | "I sort of felt inferior, like by seeking support I was weaker" (I) | |
| Subordinate themes | **3.1 Positive and negative experiences of seeking support** | **3.2 Coming forward for help (reasons behind)** |
| Examples of data | "But they were very helpful in giving me advice about how to handle situations like mine and they actually said that there…that men can be victims of domestic abuse, and this was helpful to hear" (P) | "I think the fact that I couldn't cope with the feelings of shame anymore" (C) |

**Appendix 5: Overview table of superordinate and subordinate themes**

## Appendix 6: Example of development of themes from transcript extract

### Andreas:

**Int 2: How did it feel to seek support?**

| Codes | | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Support as foreign<br>Discomfort of support<br><br>Fear of judgement<br>The 'only abused man'<br>It got better- takes time | *Ppn 2: It felt very strange to start with because um…it was something that I never needed before so I…in a way I didn't know how to react or what to expect.  Erm... I was anxious because erm…I…I didn't know how it was erm…I mean seeking support and also very scared erm…because I didn't know what to expect from them, how they would react to my case if you want, in a way…what I mean is erm…"Will they make fun of me? Or Am I the only man that goes to the service?" those were my erm…. thoughts so erm…it was scary and embarrassing to start with but then erm… as I got used to it, to the idea, it felt more comfortable.* | Barriers to seeking/receiving support |

**Int 3: Hmm… so difficult to start with but then it got better.**

*Ppn 3: Yeah…(nods).*

**Int 4: Could you tell me whether there was anything that delayed you seeking support? Was seeking support difficult or challenging in any way?**

*Ppn 4: Yeah, erm…I think, as I mentioned, that seeking support was delayed for me because of the strangeness I felt about seeking support and also because of my anxiety and nervousness, that erm…I didn't know what to expect or how they would react at the organisation. I mean they have erm…seen other cases of domestic violence but erm…I was thinking "was there another man or am I the only softie that his partner abused?" you know? This was going through my mind constantly. And the fear and stress I felt, I think, erm…made the whole thing about support difficult, for example when I called I remember I was um… shaking like a fish, if you know what I mean. It was difficult to start with, erm…yeah seeking support was difficult, I felt embarrassed about what happened and this with the other thoughts and feelings erm…delayed the process.*

**Int 5: Mmm (nods)… Would you mind telling me whether you sought alternative sources of support or whether you leaned on others before you attended the service?**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Social support | | |
| Visible signs of abuse | | |
| Lying was safer | | |

Ppn 5: *Yes, erm…mainly my best friend umm… before I shared what happened with her umm…so before she knew she realised that there was something wrong and that I wasn't myself so she was constantly asking me what was wrong but I mainly replied by saying that it was because of work, erm…that I was stressed and tired because of work erm…but I think she knew that it wasn't that, I…I liked the fact that she didn't pressure she just said "when you are ready you know that you can tell me". I really appreciated that erm…but she also gave me the phone number of a psychologist before she even knew about what was going on between Emily (pseudonym) and myself…erm….she just gave me the number for whatever support I needed she said and she advised me that I will feel better and relieved after my first session but this was outside my comfort zone because I never needed before and in general, my family was somewhat erm…not against psychologists but erm…reserved in a way about it erm…that everything that happens we should be able to cope with it by ourselves without help from anyone or especially someone that we don't know that might discuss us with someone else and make fun of us. So after a lot of delay in contacting the psychologist, I thought that I couldn't continue anymore like that erm…and so I called and went for a number of sessions and the psychologist was the erm…one who advised me about SPAVO. It was very helpful because then, I went through them. After the sessions with the psychologist and erm…coming in contact with the organisation and um… receiving support from there also I was able to open up to my best friend who was also someone I leaned on for support.*

Left margin labels:
- Friend's notions of support
- Family's notions of support
- Coping independently (value of)
- Coming forward for help
- Importance/ benefits of support

Right margin labels:
- Barriers for support
- Barriers for support
- Coming forward for help
- Positive experiences of support

**Int 6: Mmm… I see. If you don't mind me asking, what kind of support did you receive?**

| Practical help – Types of support received | |
|---|---|
| Not the only male victim (relief) | |
| Confirmation of abuse by others | |
| Loosing sanity | |
| It's me | |

*Ppn 6: Erm…They supported me in legal stuff, for example contacting the police etc.… it was something, co…contacting the police was something that erm…I was dreading and didn't want to even think about, but erm…they also brought me in contact with a psychologist that specialised in domestic abuse. They were also very good in reassuring me that these things happen to both men and erm…women and that it wasn't only me that was abused by his erm…partner. They also reassured me that what was going on erm…between myself and Emily, basically what Emily was doing was not erm…normal or okay because at some point, erm… before I contacted the service I thought that I might be going crazy and that erm…. everything was in my mind or my imagination that um…. Everything was okay, everything she was doing was normal and I was the one that had the problem and that I was making a big fuss [translation from Greek] out of nothing.*

| Positive experiences of seeking support |
|---|
| Failed men- Experience of being a male victim |
| Impacts of abuse |

**Int 7: Hmm… So what made you come forward for help?**

| Effects of struggling alone | |
|---|---|
| Enough was enough | |
| Psychological impacts | |
| Drowning in experience | |
| Isolation | |
| Reasons for support | |

*Ppn 7: I think the fact that…erm…I was…I don't know the expression in English… erm… that I was bottling up [translation from Greek] everything to the point that I felt that I couldn't anymore…I was going to explode! The only one I talked to was my best friend and I wasn't even saying the truth about what was going on erm… I shared the truth with her some months after it started. I felt very low, stressed and anxious but erm…also scared for my job erm…my personal life that I didn't have a personal life, that I was drowning, I felt like I was drowning, that I couldn't breathe! And I also felt lonely that I was loosing friends and family but also that no one knew, erm… it was dragging me down. These reasons made me contact the first psychologist that my best friend recommended and from there, the organisation.*

| Coming forward for help |
|---|
| Impacts of abuse |
| Coming forward for help |

166

**Int 8: Mm…I see (Nods). Can you tell me when you started realizing that your partner was abusive?**

| | |
|---|---|
| Misinterpreting Partner's intentions | |
| Mind is playing tricks | |
| Blurry nature of abuse | |
| Realisation of her nature | |
| Shame | |
| Fear of judgement | |
| Useless man | |
| Failing at masculine roles | |

*Ppn 8: Erm… I think that at the start I um…kind of ignored the signs no, erm…so basically not ignored but was unaware, I thought that erm…she was overly interested in me, my day and everything erm…I didn't perceive it as abusive I thought it was interest… Then, when I realised that something was wrong erm…in her behaviour? Sorry in what was going on, as I said earlier, I thought that I was the one that had the problem erm…that everything was my imagination, in my head basically or that um…I was exaggerating, yeah…. I went through a lot of erm…phases and it took time to understand that she was abusive. I think that I started realising when erm…she contacted my boss at work…erm…at first I felt embarrassed to the point that I wanted to quit my job, um…I couldn't even look at my boss or colleagues because I thought that they would make…be making fun of me and discussing between them the conversation between herself and my boss but also erm…that she is the leader of the house and that I am like a sheep that follows kind of…if you know what I mean, that she is wearing the pants in our house, I am not sure if you can say this phrase in English.*

Right column codes:
- Deceitful perpetrator
- Deceitful perpetrator
- Impacts of abuse
- Failed men