



Position Paper

The effect of victims and perpetrators' sex on intervening in non-physical intimate partner violence scenarios

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A B S T R A C T

Non-physical intimate partner violence (NPIPV) encompasses emotional, psychological, and financial abuse within intimate relationships, increasingly recognized for its subtle yet pervasive impact. This study investigates demographic and situational influences on observers' responses to NPIPV scenarios, involving 381 participants (54 % female). Utilizing factorial vignette designs, we analysed how manipulating victim and perpetrator sex affected evaluations of abuse, intervention likelihood, and recommendations for professional support and police reporting. Results from ordinal logistic regression indicate significant associations: observer ethnicity influenced abuse perceptions, with lower odds among mixed and Black ethnicities compared to White participants. Interactions between observer sex and victim-perpetrator dyads revealed nuanced perceptions. Additionally, observer sex and ethnicity influenced support-seeking recommendations, while reporting to police recommendations varied by victim-perpetrator characteristics and marital status. These findings emphasize the necessity of accounting for demographic factors in addressing NPIPV and devising targeted interventions for improving access to health and criminal justice services.

1. Introduction

Non-physical intimate partner violence (NPIPV) encompasses forms of abuse that, while non-physical, can have profound and long-lasting impacts on victims. This includes emotional and psychological abuse (e.g., manipulation, monitoring, threats, and coercion) as well as financial abuse (e.g., restricting financial independence or imposing economic control) (Dutton and Goodman, 2005). Unlike physical IPV, NPIPV relies on covert and insidious tactics that create significant barriers to recognition and prevention (Breiding et al., 2014). Although often overlapping with psychological violence, NPIPV is uniquely characterised by methods of control and restriction that extend beyond purely emotional harm, such as financial limitations and enforced isolation. As such NPIPV demands specific attention within IPV research due to its nuanced impact on victims and its distinct challenges to observer recognition and intervention.

Research indicates that NPIPV victims are often subjected to blame for the abuse they endure (Capezza and Arriaga, 2008), akin to victims of sexual and physical IPV (Eigenberg and Policastro, 2016; A. Grubb and Turner, 2012). This blame exacerbates their suffering and isolation, particularly affecting individuals in non-traditional gender or sexual orientation contexts, such as male victims or those in LGB relationships (Edwards and Sylaska, 2013; Widanaralalage et al., 2022). It is, therefore, essential to examine the situational factors that contribute to observers' failure to identify NPIPV. This investigation aims to enhance bystander responses and behaviours, improve support provision through increased awareness, policy reform, and better practices, and encourage involvement from criminal justice agencies. This study investigates how the demographic characteristics of observers, as well as victim and perpetrator, influence their propensity to intervene and offer support.

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1.1. Prevalence, impacts, and reactions to NPIPV

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), nearly half of women (47 %) and men (46 %) in the United States have reported experiencing psychological aggression (Breiding et al., 2014). Similarly, data from the Australian Institute Of Health And Welfare (2019) reveals that since the age of 15, approximately one in four women (23 %, or 2.2 million) and one in six men (16 %, or 1.4 million) have encountered emotional abuse from a current or past partner. Moreover, research highlights the significant prevalence of NPIPV in relationships among sexual and gender minorities, with rates comparable to or higher than those in heterosexual relationships (K. Edwards et al., 2015). For instance, Edwards and Sylaska (2013) found that 16.1 % of LGBTQ college youth reported NPIPV victimization, while 12.5 % reported perpetration. Additionally, Stephenson and Finneran (2013) found that over 27 % of gay and bisexual men in their sample reported NPIPV.

Understanding the prevalence of NPIPV is complicated by variations across countries, cultures, and ethnicities in reporting and disclosing victimization (Heise et al., 2019). Some suggest a higher prevalence of NPIPV in cultures that prioritize conformity, interdependence, and familial honour (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011, 2012). For example, Whitfield et al. (2021) found a significant association between race/ethnicity and emotional IPV among ethnically diverse LGBT college students, with Black, Hispanic, and Other ethnicities reporting higher levels of emotional IPV compared to White and Asian respondents. Crucially, understanding ethnic minorities recognition and reporting of NPIPV as a legitimate form of abuse remains underdeveloped (Holliday et al., 2020), with evidence suggesting cultural differences in victims' help-seeking and police reporting intentions (Ackerman and Love, 2014; Cheng and Lo, 2015; Lipsky et al., 2006, 2009; Widanaralalage et al., 2024).

Barriers to NPIPV recognition, disclosure, and help seeking highlight the importance of bystanders' reactions and interventions in supporting NPIPV victims (Hall et al., 2023). Research indicates that third party responses to IPV victims vary significantly based on the characteristics of both victims and observers, affecting perceptions of responsibility, empathy, and intervention decisions (e.g. Bosma et al., 2018; Pagliaro et al., 2019; Weitzman et al., 2020; Whatley, 1996). Gender disparities are evident, with studies demonstrating harsher judgments toward male-to-female violence compared to female-to-male violence (Hammock et al., 2015). Notably, while recognition of male NPIPV by bystanders is limited, distinct patterns of blame attribution exist depending on the Sex of the victim and/or perpetrator in IPV situations. Observers may fault female victims for not leaving the abusive relationship or confronting the perpetrator, even when informed about the associated risks (Halket et al., 2014). Conversely, male victims may face blame for not adhering to traditional masculine values of strength, independence, and resilience (Addis and Mahalik, 2003), a trend observed in the literature on male domestic and sexual violence (Perryman and Appleton, 2016; Widanaralalage et al., 2022). Interestingly, attitudes towards male-on-female psychological abuse predict attitudes towards female-perpetrated IPV (Conroy et al., 2023), suggesting a broader pattern of gender-bias in perception and evaluation of NPIPV.

Given the high prevalence of victimization among sexual minorities (Porsch et al., 2022), addressing the potential stigmatizing and biased reactions that observers may have when witnessing NPIPV in LGBTQ + relationships is critical. Research indicates that same-sex couples often encounter stigma that negatively impacts their health and well-being, compounding the effects of IPV (Frost and LeBlanc, 2023). Studies suggest that male, gay victims who fail to resist a perpetrator are more likely to face victim-blaming than other victims (Davies et al., 2009), although some findings indicate that gay and lesbian victims may receive support akin to that given to heterosexual women (Sorenson and Thomas, 2009). This discrepancy highlights the nuanced ways in which gender and sexual orientation shape bystander responses. For example, Sylaska and Walters (2014) found that male bystanders were more inclined to blame the victim and disregard the situation, while female bystanders often encouraged the victim to seek help. Scenarios featuring male victims were perceived as less severe, with male victims seen as more responsible for the violence than female victims. These findings underscore a broader gap in understanding attitudes toward same-sex IPV, suggesting a need for greater awareness and targeted interventions (Sylaska and Walters, 2014).

Recent qualitative studies offer insights into the unique dynamics of NPIPV in LGBTQ + contexts across cultures. Ummak et al., 2024a,b found that LGB individuals in Türkiye experience IPV through themes such as sexual identity invalidation, sexual control, forced disclosure, and binegativity, highlighting distinctive power dynamics in LGB relationships that necessitate tailored support. Similarly, Ummak et al., 2024a,b reported that LGB individuals in Norway experienced IPV through psychological, physical, sexual, and economic abuse, with themes like domination, identity invalidation, and jealousy-based vulnerability, underscoring the need for interventions addressing LGB-specific vulnerabilities. In other contexts, restrictive norms further complicate LGBTQ + IPV experiences. Cleghorn et al. (2022) identified three main IPV narratives—control, resistance, and conflict—within same-gender relationships in Trinidad and Tobago, shaped by conservative social norms. Likewise, DiStefano (2009) documented unrecognized IPV in LGBTQ + relationships in Japan, with lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals reporting higher abuse rates and experiencing compounded stigma and harm. An intersectional lens is crucial to understanding NPIPV among LGBTQ + individuals with multiple minority identities. For example, Ummak et al. (2022) found that queer women from ethnic minority backgrounds in Norway face unique IPV challenges, as overlapping identities often intensify power imbalances, isolation, and access barriers to support. These studies highlight the importance of culturally tailored interventions that address stigma, disclosure fears, and service biases, thus better supporting individuals with intersecting marginalized identities.

1.2. The role of observer characteristics

Observer characteristics significantly influence the perception and response to interpersonal violence. Gender differences are commonly observed in attitudes toward physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Studies consistently show that male observers tend to be more condoning of perpetrators and exhibit more negative biases toward victims compared to female observers (Grubb and

Harrower, 2009). Additionally, research indicates that men and women may attribute less blame to female perpetrators, especially in cases of provocation (Davies and Rogers, 2006; Rhatigan et al., 2011). However, the impact of gender may vary across ethnic and cultural contexts. Some evidence suggests that women from Southeast Asian and sub-Saharan countries exhibit higher rates of condoning attitudes towards violence against women compared to men (Uthman et al., 2009; Yount et al., 2014). This underscores how cultural norms and gender inequalities within familial and interpersonal relationships can mitigate perceptions of emotional and psychological forms of interpersonal violence (Bui et al., 2012).

Other demographic characteristics have been explored in relation to victim blaming, including age, education, and relationship/marital status, though findings can be inconsistent depending on the forms of violence under study and the stimuli/measures in use. For example, older participants are typically found to hold victim blaming attitudes against male rape victims (Walfield, 2018) and partner violence against women (Gracia and Tomás, 2014). However, earlier evidence from married or cohabiting women from Zimbabwe demonstrates that women who are older are less likely to believe that wife beating is justified (Hindin, 2003). Similarly, marital/relationship status yields mixed effects: Yount et al. (2014) finding that almost all married women (95.1 %) and most married men (76.9 %) in a Vietnamese sample found good reason to hit a wife for at least one of 10 gender transgressions. Some also suggest that women who are currently or have been married are more likely to justify husband's abuse under certain circumstances, such as neglecting children or going out without informing him (Speizer, 2010). It is important to note how the above findings often highlight high prevalence of IPV victimization and/or exposure within the studied sample, indicative of the normalisation of such behaviours in these communities.

Despite the above, there are significant gaps in our knowledge of how observer characteristics influence an individual's likelihood of intervening, providing support, and reporting to the police when witnessing emotional and psychological forms of abuse. The paucity of research on emotional and psychological abuse is of significance, given their profound impact on well-being. The current study aims to investigate factors that influence observers' likelihood of intervening in NPIPV situations. The study seeks to examine how observer characteristics interact with the sex of victims and perpetrators to affect attitudes towards abuse, willingness to intervene, and recommendations for professional support and police involvement. The study utilized a vignette-based design to explore how demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, level of education, and marital status moderate the relationship between observers' attitudes and their willingness to intervene in hypothetical NPIPV scenarios.

2. Methods

2.1. Design

The study employed a factorial vignette approach to investigate non-physical intimate partner violence. Specifically, perpetrator and victim sex were factorially manipulated to explore four dependent variables of interest: 1) evaluations of abuse, 2) intervention likelihood, 3) likelihood of recommending seeking professional support and 4) likelihood of recommending reporting to the police.

2.2. Participants

This study was conducted in the UK. Participants were opportunistically recruited to take part in the study through use of an advertisement poster shared across social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter, and Redditt) (see Table 1). Among eligible participants, 202 males and 235 females started the survey, and 174 males and 207 females completed it ($N = 381$). This results in a pseudo completion rate of 86.14 % for males and 88.09 % for females, indicating that the majority of participants who started the survey completed it, with a slightly higher completion rate observed in females, though this difference was not statistically significant, $Z = -0.50$, $p = .619$ (two-tailed). The remaining participant data was largely complete, with only Age ($n = 1$) and Marital Status ($n = 6$) containing missing values. Given the low level of missingness in the data, no further missing data treatment was carried out. Research suggests that when missing data is less than 5 % and appears random, the impact on results is negligible, allowing for valid analyses with available data (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). On average, participants were 25.15 years old at the time of survey administration ($SD = 7.25$) and most participants were of Asian (39 %) or White (37 %) ethnic background.¹ Eighty-six percent of participants reported being single and 53 % were educated to degree level or above. The inclusion criteria for the participants were being 18 years and above and able to read and understand English. No financial reward was offered for participation (see Table 2).

2.3. Materials

The study utilized a self-administered online survey questionnaire created using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics XM). The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section collected demographic information from participants, including sex, age, ethnicity, education, and marital status. The second section presented participants with one of four vignettes depicting a non-physical intimate partner violence (IPV) scenario. The vignettes were developed using a factorial design that varied the sex of the perpetrator

¹ In this study, we utilized broad ethnic categories, such as 'Asian' and 'Black,' to classify participants. It is important to note that these categories encompass significant diversity; for example, 'Asian' includes individuals from various backgrounds such as Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi communities, each with distinct cultural perspectives. Future research should consider a more nuanced approach to ethnic categorization to capture these cultural differences.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics, with frequency and valid percentages.

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Sex		
Female	208	55 %
Male	173	45 %
Age		
18-24	226	59 %
25-34	115	30 %
35-44	32	8 %
45-54	6	2 %
55-64	1	>1 %
65+	1	>1 %
Ethnicity		
Asian	150	39 %
White	140	37 %
Black	14	4 %
Mixed	39	10 %
Other	38	10 %
Marital Status		
Single (included separated and divorced)	324	86 %
Married	51	14 %
Education		
Up to A-level	179	47 %
Undergraduate degree or above	202	53 %

Table 2
Descriptives for the four ordinal outcomes measured.

	Median	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Perceived Abuse	5	4	1	5
Intervention Likelihood	7	9	1	10
Recommend seeking professional help	8	9	1	10
Recommend contacting the police	5	9	1	10

and victim, emphasizing key aspects of IPV dynamics as described by [Dutton and Goodman \(2005\)](#). These aspects include the social ecology that isolates the victim, the setting of coercive demands paired with credible threats for noncompliance, surveillance through monitoring behaviours, the delivery of implied consequences for disobedience, and the emotional and behavioural responses of the victim, illustrating the complexities of power and control in such relationships.

Your work colleague *Simon/Sarah* has been in a 10-month relationship with *her/his boyfriend/girlfriend Harry/Holly*. You've noticed that since the relationship started, *he/she* has become more reserved and withdrawn. *He/she* does not attend any work functions anymore and rarely answers calls or responds to texts. You also notice that *he/she* does not talk about *his/her* family anymore – a topic that *he/she* often used to discuss at work. Worried about *Simon/Sarah*, one day at work, you inquire about *his/her* well-being. *He/she* confides that *Harry/Holly* doesn't let *him/her* go out alone because *he/she* is uneasy about *him/her* interacting with other *men/women*. *He/she* also checks *Simon/Sarah's* phone daily, reads *his/her* messages, and has installed a tracking app on *his/her* phone. Additionally, *he/she* restricts *his/her* from meeting *his/her* family, as they do not see eye-to-eye.

Simon/Sarah reveals that *Harry/Holly* has also changed *his/her* wardrobe and insists that *he/she* only wear items that are not revealing, banning short sleeves and anything that reveals skin to avoid drawing attention from others. *Simon/Sarah* says that *he/she* loves *Harry/Holly* and listens to what *he/she* says to keep *him/her* happy because *he/she* feels lucky to have someone who looks after *him/her* like *Harry/Holly* does. *He/she* further says that as long as *he/she* is careful and does not do anything that displeases *Harry/Holly*, *he/she* takes very good care of *him/her*. *Harry/Holly* even keeps tabs on *Simon/Sarah's* bank statements and holds *him/her* bank card so *he/she* "doesn't waste money," which supposedly helps them save for a future together. While *Simon/Sarah* claims *he/she* is content in the relationship, *he/she* often expresses feeling anxious and being careful to be on *his/her* "best behaviour" to not upset *Holly/Harry*.

What do you do?

Following the vignette, participants were asked four questions: (1) Do you consider this an abusive relationship? (2) On a scale of 1–10, how likely are you to intervene? (3) On a scale of 1–10, how likely are you to recommend seeking professional help, i.e., a doctor? (4) On a scale of 1–10 how likely are you to recommend contacting the police? (see [Table 1](#) below).

2.4. Procedure

The participants were informed about the study's objectives and provided their consent before being included in the study. The participants' demographic information, including age, sex, education, and marital status was collected. The study was conducted online using Qualtrics software. Participants were provided with a link to the survey and given instructions on how to complete it. They were instructed to read a randomly allocated version of the vignette and indicate how likely they were to report the behaviour to the authorities or seek help. The survey took approximately 10-min to complete. Data were collected anonymously, and participants were informed that they could exit the study at any point by closing the survey, with no requirement to notify the researchers.

2.5. Data analysis

The data collected were analysed using four separate ordinal logistic regression models, one for each dependent ordinal variable i.e., abuse evaluation, intervention likelihood, recommending formal support, and involving the police. For each DV, a maximal model including all possible factors and covariates as well as all two-way interactions with the condition variable was reduced sequentially by dropping non-significant terms. Two-way interactions were considered first before main effects were evaluated.

2.6. Ethics

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the BPS Ethics and Declaration of Helsinki. The participants were informed of the study's objectives, and their consent was obtained before inclusion in the study. The participants' confidentiality was ensured by not including any identifying information in the survey questionnaire. The data collected was kept confidential and used only for research purposes. The study was approved by the University of Westminster.

3. Results

The results of the study are presented into four main categories: abuse evaluation, intervention likelihood, recommending professional support, and reporting to the police.

For abuse evaluation, the ordinal logistic regression model coefficients are presented in Table 3. The model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(9) = 54.12$, $p < .001$, indicating that the set of predictors reliably distinguished between the levels of abuse perception. Observer ethnicity was significant, with participants of mixed ethnicity ($b = -1.73$, $OR = 0.18$, $p < .001$) and Black ethnicity ($b = -1.54$, $OR = 0.52$, $p < .003$) being associated with lower odds of perceiving scenarios as abusive compared to White participants. There was also a significant interaction between observer and victim sex, where male observers were less likely to view male victim scenarios as abusive compared to female observers rating female victim scenarios as abusive compared to female observers rating female victim scenario ($b = -0.96$, $OR = 0.38$, $p = .027$; see Fig. 1). Furthermore, a significant interaction effect was found between victim and perpetrator sex, showing that combinations of victim and perpetrator sex influenced abuse perception, particularly at higher abuse ratings such as "Definitely Abuse" ($b = 0.89$, $OR = 2.43$, $p = .044$; Fig. 2).

In terms of intervention likelihood, the model coefficients are displayed in Table 4. The overall model was found to be not statistical significance, $\chi^2(12) = 20.96$, $p = 0.051$.

For the recommendation of professional support, the model was statistically significant ($\chi^2(14) = 27.79$, $p = 0.01$) as presented in Table 5. Observer sex had a significant effect, where males had 7.28 higher odds ($b = 1.99$, $OR = 7.28$, $p = 0.012$) of recommending professional support compared to female observers. A main effect of ethnicity was also found, as Black respondents were marginally less likely to recommend professional support than White respondents ($b = -5.81$, $OR = 0.00$, $p = 0.025$). There were also notable

Table 3
Ordinal logistic regression results for perceived abuse.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio	95 % Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Observer Sex:							
Male – Female	–0.03	0.31	–0.10	0.920	0.97	0.53	1.78
Ethnicity							
Mixed – White	–1.73	0.37	–4.65	<0.001	0.18	0.09	0.37
Asian – White	–0.35	0.26	–1.34	0.179	0.70	0.42	1.17
Black – White	–1.54	0.52	–2.96	0.003	0.21	0.08	0.60
Other – White	–0.59	0.38	–1.57	0.117	0.55	0.26	1.18
Victim Sex:							
Male – Female	–0.12	0.36	–0.33	0.744	0.89	0.44	1.81
Perpetrator Sex:							
Male – Female	0.41	0.30	1.36	0.174	1.51	0.83	2.73
Observer Sex * Victim Sex:							
(Male – Female) * (Male – Female)	–0.96	0.43	–2.21	0.027	0.38	0.16	0.90
Victim Sex * Perpetrator Sex:							
(Male – Female) * (Male – Female)	0.89	0.44	2.02	0.044	2.43	1.03	5.79

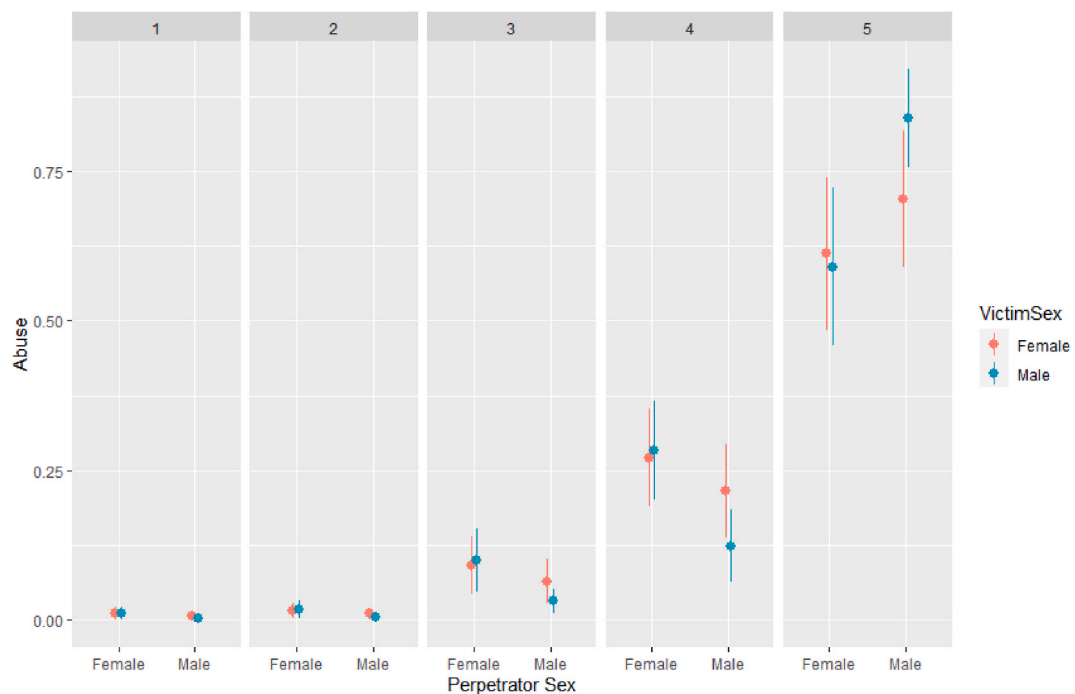


Fig. 1. Interaction effect of victim and perpetrator sex on abuse evaluation.

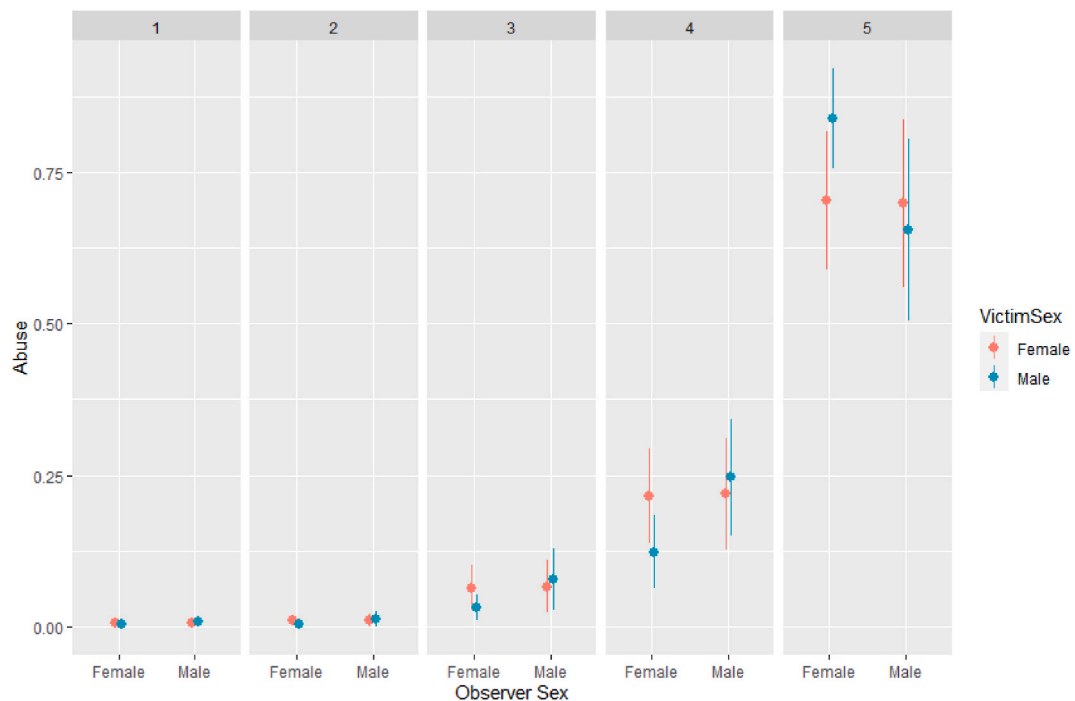


Fig. 2. Interaction effect of victim and observer sex on abuse evaluation.

interactions by age and ethnicity, where a negative interaction between age and observer sex indicated that with each additional year, the odds of recommending support decreased more for males than females ($b = -0.08$, $OR = 0.93$, $p = .016$; Fig. 3). Furthermore, age interactions by ethnicity revealed that each additional year of age decreased the odds of recommending support for individuals of mixed ethnicity relative to White respondents ($b = -0.08$, $OR = 0.92$, $p = .047$; Fig. 4), while age increased the difference in odds of

Table 4
Ordinal logistic regression results for intervention likelihood.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio	95 % Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Observer Sex:							
Male – Female	0.26	0.27	0.96	0.339	1.29	0.76	2.18
Age	−0.02	0.02	−1.36	0.175	0.98	0.95	1.01
Ethnicity:							
Mixed – White	−0.87	1.08	−0.81	0.420	0.42	0.05	3.45
Asian – White	−1.69	0.82	−2.06	0.039	0.19	0.04	0.95
Black – White	−5.46	2.39	−2.28	0.022	0.00	0.00	0.43
Other – White	−2.60	1.48	−1.76	0.078	0.07	0.00	1.21
Victim Sex:							
Male – Female	0.23	0.24	0.96	0.339	1.26	0.78	2.02
Age * Ethnicity:							
Age * (Mixed – White)	−0.01	0.04	−0.14	0.888	0.99	0.92	1.08
Age * (Asian – White)	0.06	0.03	1.79	0.074	1.06	0.99	1.13
Age * (Black – White)	0.20	0.09	2.21	0.027	1.23	1.03	1.51
Age * (Other – White)	0.09	0.06	1.43	0.153	1.09	0.97	1.24
Observer Sex * Victim Sex:							
(Male – Female) * (Male – Female)	−0.76	0.37	−2.04	0.042	0.47	0.22	0.97

Table 5
Ordinal logistic regression results for recommending seeking professional help.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio	95 % Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Observer Sex:							
Male – Female	1.99	0.79	2.50	0.012	7.28	1.53	34.96
Age	0.06	0.03	1.94	0.052	1.06	1.00	1.13
Ethnicity:							
Mixed – White	1.33	1.08	1.23	0.217	3.78	0.44	31.91
Asian – White	−0.61	0.94	−0.64	0.519	0.55	0.08	3.25
Black – White	−5.81	2.59	−2.24	0.025	0.00	0.00	0.27
Other – White	1.38	2.07	0.67	0.504	3.98	0.06	178.55
Education:							
Degree – Up to A-Level	−0.08	0.20	−0.42	0.678	0.92	0.62	1.36
Victim Sex:							
Male – Female	−0.28	0.18	−1.53	0.126	0.76	0.53	1.08
Perpetrator Sex:							
Male – Female	0.20	0.18	1.08	0.280	1.22	0.85	1.75
Age * Observer Sex:							
Age * (Male – Female)	−0.08	0.03	−2.41	0.016	0.93	0.87	0.99
Age * Ethnicity:							
Age * (Mixed – White)	−0.08	0.04	−1.99	0.047	0.92	0.85	1.00
Age * (Asian – White)	0.04	0.04	0.94	0.348	1.04	0.97	1.12
Age * (Black – White)	0.22	0.11	2.09	0.037	1.25	1.05	1.63
Age * (Other – White)	−0.06	0.09	−0.68	0.496	0.94	0.80	1.13

Table 6
Ordinal logistic regression results for recommending contacting the police.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio	95 % Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Victim Sex:							
Male – Female	−0.64	0.30	−2.12	0.034	0.53	0.29	0.95
Perpetrator Sex:							
Male – Female	0.62	0.19	3.28	0.001	1.86	1.29	2.71
Observer Sex:							
Male – Female	−0.04	0.20	−0.19	0.852	0.96	0.64	1.44
Age	0.01	0.02	0.55	0.579	1.01	0.98	1.04
Ethnicity:							
Mixed – White	−0.75	0.45	−1.67	0.096	0.47	0.19	1.14
Asian – White	0.21	0.31	0.70	0.486	1.24	0.68	2.26
Black – White	0.04	0.82	0.05	0.960	1.04	0.20	5.39
Other – White	−0.13	0.46	−0.28	0.777	0.88	0.35	2.17
Marital Status:							
Married – Single	0.60	0.31	1.97	0.048	1.83	1.01	3.34
Education:							
Degree – Up to A-level	−0.37	0.20	−1.92	0.055	0.69	0.47	1.01
Victim Sex * Ethnicity:							
(Male – Female) * (Mixed -White)	0.73	0.67	1.10	0.272	2.08	0.56	7.74
(Male – Female) * (Asian – White)	0.29	0.41	0.70	0.487	1.33	0.59	2.99
(Male – Female) * (Black – White)	2.80	1.14	2.46	0.014	16.40	1.79	165.18
(Male – Female) * (Other – White)	0.46	0.67	0.68	0.496	1.58	0.42	5.96

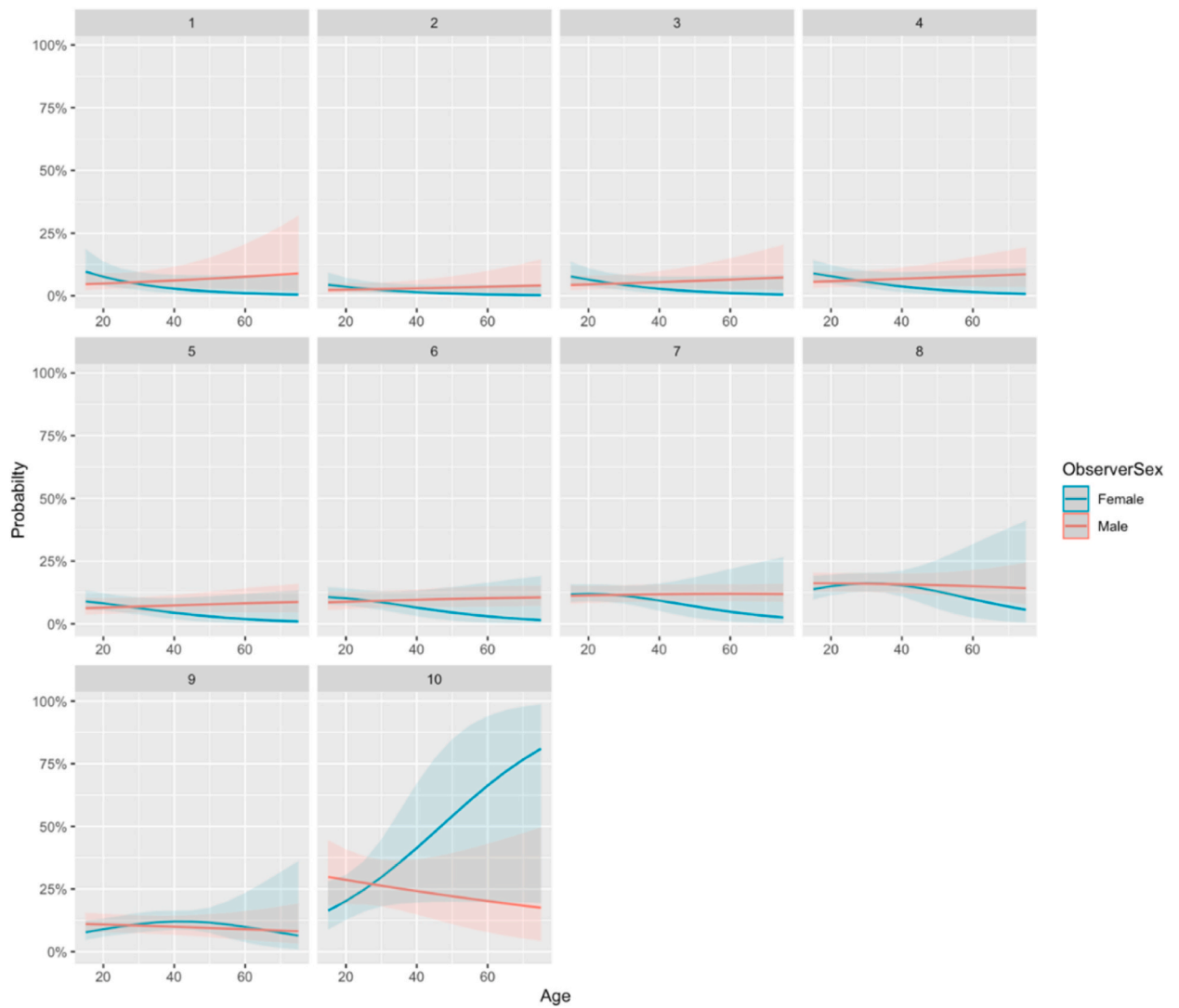


Fig. 3. Interaction effect of age and observer sex on recommending professional support.

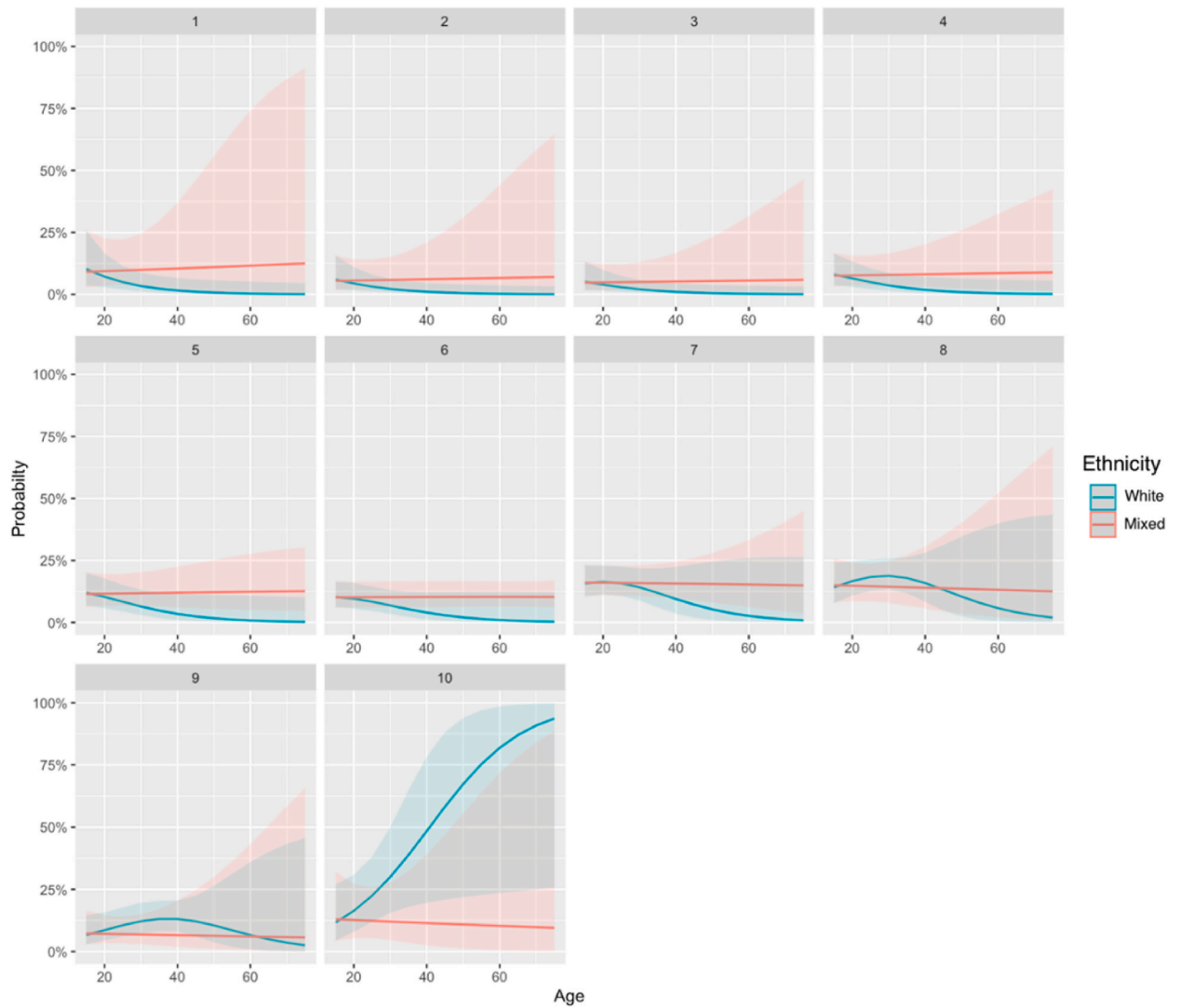


Fig. 4. Interaction effect of age and mixed ethnicity on recommending professional support.

recommending support between Black and White respondents ($b = 0.22$, $OR = 1.25$, $p = .037$; Fig. 5) (see Table 6).

Lastly, in recommending reporting to the police, the model was also statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 39.86$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.01$) and is displayed in Table 5. Victim sex was a significant predictor, with male victims having lower odds ($b = -0.64$, $OR = 0.53$, $p = .034$) of being recommended for police reporting than female victims. Perpetrator sex was also significant; participants were more likely to recommend reporting to the police when the perpetrator was male ($b = 0.62$, $OR = 1.86$, $p = .001$). Marital status was a predictor, as married participants had higher odds of recommending police reporting compared to single participants. Additionally, a significant interaction was found between male victims and Black observers compared to female victims and White observers, with Black observers rating male victims higher in terms of police reporting likelihood than White observers rating female victims ($b = 2.80$, $OR = 16.40$, $p = .014$; Fig. 6).

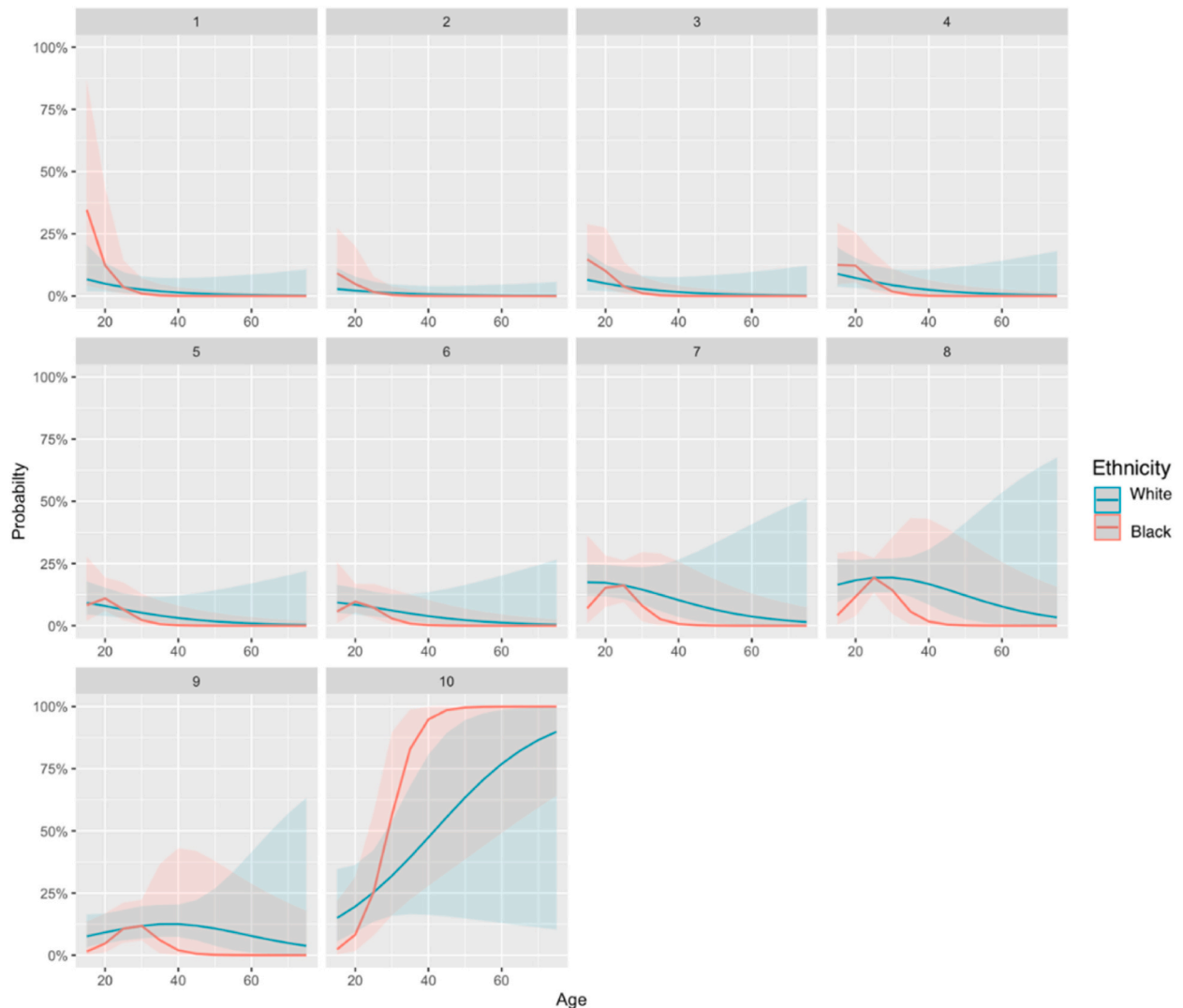


Fig. 5. Interaction effect of age and Black ethnicity on recommending professional support.

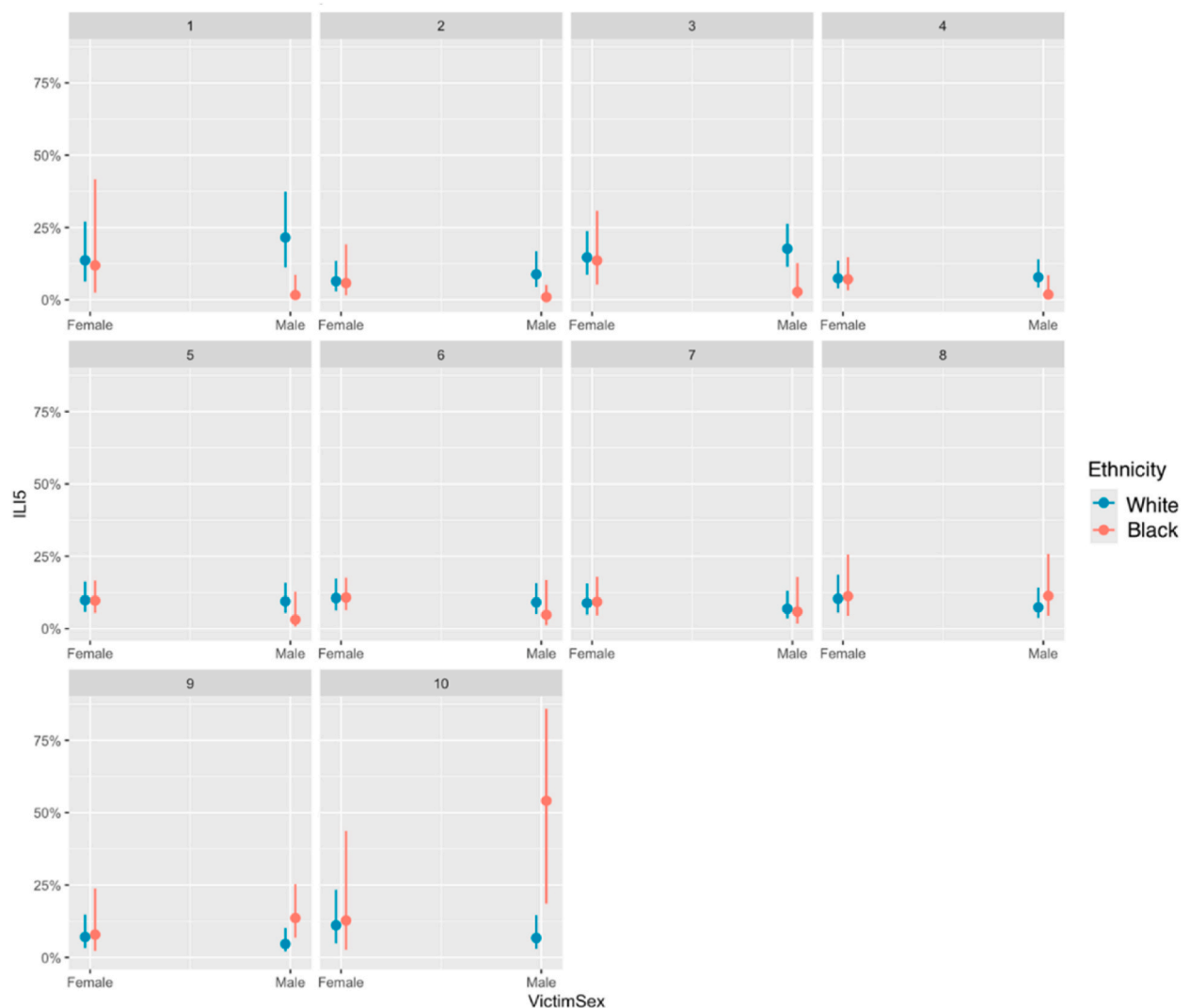


Fig. 6. Interaction effect of ethnicity and victim sex on recommending reporting to the police.

4. Discussion

The present study examined the interactions between observer characteristics and the sex of victims and perpetrators in scenarios of non-physical intimate partner violence (NPIPV). Our investigation aimed to explore how these factors influence respondents' assessments of abuse legitimacy, intervention likelihood, suggestions for seeking professional support, and police involvement recommendations. Interestingly, we found no main effect of respondents' sex on abuse evaluation, which contrasts with existing literature that typically finds male respondents more prone to victim-blaming and less likely to recognize violence in intimate relationships (van der Bruggen and Grubb, 2014; Willmott et al., 2024; Willmott and Widanaralage, 2024). This unexpected finding may suggest that the relationship between observer sex and abuse evaluation is more complex than previously assumed and could be influenced by interaction effects that the main effect alone did not capture.

The significant interactions between observer-victim sex and victim-perpetrator sex highlight the nuanced dynamics in observers' engagement with NPIPV scenarios. For example, the victim-observer sex interaction may be indicative of how men themselves enforce masculinity norms and judge other men by their ability to meet their expectations (Fields et al., 2015). Furthermore, the victim-perpetrator sex interaction, where male-on-male scenarios were viewed as more abusive than female-on-female scenarios, points to the possibility that intimate partner violence among women is underrecognized compared to male-perpetrated violence (Fisher and Pina, 2013; Weare, 2018). This variation in abuse evaluation underscores the existence of gendered perspectives in NPIPV, whereby controlling, emotional, and financial aggressions are more easily recognized when perpetrated against a female victim by a male partner.

Ethnicity also emerged as a significant factor in abuse evaluations, with White respondents more readily identifying scenarios as

abusive compared to participants from Black and Mixed ethnic backgrounds, while Asian and Other were not significantly different from White participants. The existing literature presents mixed findings on how cultural and ethnic differences influence attitudes toward intimate partner violence (Cho, 2012). Given the limitations related to the underrepresentation of certain ethnic groups in our sample, these findings should be interpreted cautiously. Nevertheless, they suggest potential ethnic variations in recognizing and interpreting psychological and coercive forms of abuse. Further research is warranted to explore how NPIPV is understood within various communities, particularly given the context of increased rates of IPV perpetration among Black/African American populations (e.g., Lipsky et al., 2012; West, 2012).

While our model did not achieve statistical significance for intervention likelihood, some trends were noteworthy. Specifically, White participants appeared more inclined to intervene in NPIPV scenarios, suggesting potential awareness gaps across racial groups. Conversely, the observed trend where Black participants were less likely to intervene may warrant further examination. The interaction effects related to age also merit attention; notably, older Black participants showed higher intervention rates compared to younger participants, suggesting complex dynamics that require more in-depth exploration (Ahrold and Meston, 2010; Chris et al., 2006; Guo, 2019).

In the context of recommending professional support, observer characteristics significantly influenced recommendations. Contrary to expectations, male observers were more likely to recommend support than female observers. This may reflect shifts in gender attitudes across generations (Cichy et al., 2007). The interaction between age and ethnicity, particularly between Mixed and White respondents, indicates that cultural beliefs and experiences may shape perceptions of support services across demographic groups, suggesting avenues for further research. When considering recommendations for police involvement, both victim and perpetrator characteristics emerged as significant predictors. Male victims were less likely to be recommended for police involvement, whereas scenarios involving male perpetrators increased recommendations for reporting. This finding highlights a gendered double standard that discourages male victims from seeking justice while viewing male perpetrators as a greater threat. Such differences are documented in the attitudes of police officers towards male victims of intimate partner violence (Huntley et al., 2019; Widanaralalage et al., 2022), indicating that the biases observed in hypothetical studies may reflect real-world barriers faced by male victims seeking legal recourse.

4.1. Policy implications

The findings of this study carry significant policy implications for addressing non-physical intimate partner violence (NPIPV). One key takeaway is the urgent need for educational campaigns that raise awareness of NPIPV and challenge misconceptions surrounding male victimization, which can enhance recognition of abuse dynamics across various demographics (Pisano et al., 2024). Additionally, policymakers should advocate for resources specifically tailored to the needs of male victims, ensuring that existing support frameworks are inclusive and accessible to all victims, regardless of gender. The observed ethnic disparities in recognizing abuse further underscore the importance of culturally sensitive training for social service providers, law enforcement, and healthcare professionals to promote equitable access to support services. Such training should focus on understanding different cultural contexts, particularly in communities where stigma and secrecy may inhibit discussions about violence (Widanaralalage et al., 2024). Furthermore, ongoing research is needed to explore how bystander intervention is experienced across diverse contexts and relationships (Kuskoff and Parsell, 2024). This research can yield valuable insights into effective intervention strategies, informing evidence-based policies that respond to the realities faced by diverse populations. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to a comprehensive framework for addressing intimate partner violence in all its forms, fostering safer communities.

4.2. Limitations

While the findings offer valuable contributions, several limitations should be noted to guide future research. First, the convenience online sample may limit generalizability, necessitating random community sampling for broader representativeness. Additionally, the modest sample size, especially among minority ethnic groups, may have hindered detecting nuanced subgroup differences, highlighting the need for larger and more diverse samples. Second, the use of brief written vignettes, though pragmatic, may not fully capture the complexities of real-life NPIPV scenarios. While the vignettes used in this study were carefully constructed to align with the principles of intimate partner violence (IPV) outlined by Dutton and Goodman (2005), we acknowledge that the development process did not include direct involvement from groups with lived experiences of IPV. This omission may affect the vignette's authenticity and cultural relevance, potentially limiting its applicability to diverse populations. Future research would benefit from integrating feedback from individuals with lived experiences to ensure a more nuanced understanding of IPV dynamics and to enhance the cultural sensitivity of such narratives. Incorporating multimedia formats like video scenarios could enhance ecological validity. Integrating implicit measures could also provide deeper insights into underlying cognitive processes. Finally, focusing solely on observer perceptions and intended actions limits the exploration of actual bystander behaviours. Incorporating qualitative methods could enhance ecological validity by elucidating motivating factors driving intervention decisions from observers' perspectives. While the quantitative findings of this study provide valuable insights into the dynamics of NPIPV, we recognize that the interesting interactions observed may benefit from such qualitative exploration. Future research should consider employing methodologies such as interviews or focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms and nuances that contribute to the observed patterns in bystander intervention and abuse recognition. Addressing these limitations through rigorous multi-methodological approaches will advance understanding in this critical domain.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored how observer characteristics like sex and ethnicity interact with victim and perpetrator attributes in shaping perceptions and intended responses to non-physical intimate partner violence scenarios. The findings highlight the nuanced roles of gender, with male observers surprisingly more likely to recommend professional support, though this effect diminished with age. Ethnic differences also emerged, with Black and mixed ethnicity respondents less inclined to identify abuse compared to Whites. When it came to intervention likelihood, observer demographics did not significantly predict intentions, though trends pointed to potential ethnic and cultural influences worthy of further study. For recommending police involvement, male victims and female perpetrators were less likely to receive such recommendations, suggesting gender stereotypes at play. Intersectional effects also surfaced, with Black observers substantially more prone to recommend police for male victims compared to Whites. Despite sampling limitations, these findings underscore the complex interplay of demographic factors shaping intimate partner violence perceptions and suggest valuable avenues for future multi-method research to advance understanding and inform tailored intervention efforts across diverse groups.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

B. Kennath Widanaralage: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Evren Raman:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Anthony D. Murphy:** Writing – review & editing.

Availability of data and material and coding apparatus

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at <https://osf.io/ksqb2/>.

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