



Intimate Partner Violence and Business: Exploring the Boundaries of Ethical Enquiry

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Abstract

In this article, we conceptualize the under investigated and under theorized relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) and business responsibility. As an urgent social issue, IPV—understood as abuse of power within the context of an intimate partner relationship, mainly perpetrated by men and involving a pattern of behavior—has been studied for decades in many disciplines. A less common yet vital research perspective is to examine IPV as it relates to the business and to ask how organizations should engage with IPV. In response to this question, we contribute a framework drawing from two distinctions in the business responsibility scholarship: the assumed role of the organization (responsibility to the firm/market; responsibility to the broader socio-political-economic environment); and the second focused on the approach to conceptualizing ethics (justice/fairness; ethics of care). Thus, we explicate four approaches to business responsibility and IPV, which serve the purposes of mapping three selected contributions, identifying limitations of these approaches, and opening up future research opportunities.

Keywords Intimate partner violence · IPV · Domestic violence · Business responsibility · Ethics of care

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Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a common form of violence against women, with almost one-third (27%) of women aged between 15 and 49 years reporting that they have been subjected to some form of physical or sexual violence at the hands of their partners at least once in their life (World Health Organization, 2021). IPV refers to “any act or omission involving an abuse of power within the context of an intimate partner relationship or after separating from the relationship. It is mainly perpetrated by men, it involves a pattern of behavior (de Jonge, 2018, p. 472)”, and it has been studied for decades in disciplines such as sociology, criminology, psychology, feminist studies, and political science (Wilcox et al., 2021). This research, coupled with the rise of gender-based violence (GBV) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Wood et al., 2022), demonstrates the pervasiveness and intractability of IPV phenomena across countries, cultures, and government systems (Sardinha et al., 2022). A less common yet vital research perspective is to examine IPV as it relates to the business (O’Leary-Kelly et al., 2008). This research is uncovering insights into how IPV experiences influence work (people, experiences, processes, outcomes), and

consequently questions are emerging about how organizations should engage with IPV.

The question of what organizations should do about IPV reminds us that IPV is a phenomenon inherently connected to ethical inquiry. The *should* question arises because organizations are responsible for the health and safety of their employees and also for generating positive social impact for their varied stakeholders. IPV is arguably a threat to an organization's ability to achieve these goals because: (1) it is a harmful experience, (2) the behavior is gendered and disproportionately affects women, and (3) it could bring harm to a broad range of outcomes valued by an organization's stakeholders (e.g., fair employment practices, care for employees, strong productivity, a safe community and society, equal opportunity for all, positive returns for investors). An ethics lens is therefore an imperative lens for the examination of IPV and business.

The purpose of this special issue is to bring the scholarship of ethical inquiry to the phenomenon of IPV as it impacts the business. As described in our Call for Papers, we encouraged researchers to approach the link between IPV and business ethics from micro, meso, macro and inter-level perspectives. Areas of inquiry we specifically encouraged included: IPV and the organization of gender; IPV and the blurring of public and private spheres; IPV and the research subject; IPV and the ethics of HRM; IPV and the "Other". As you will see in the pages that follow, we will share three research papers that make significant contributions to our call.

The first paper explores institutional, stakeholder and organizational influences on corporate IPV responsiveness in Australia. Based on this empirical examination, Branicki et al. (2023) identify three key influences that positively shape corporate IPV responsiveness, including a greater level of financial resources, higher percentage of women in middle management, and a more formalized process of employee consultations on gender issues. The second paper tackles the important and oft-ignored role that the policies and practices of financial institutions play in inadvertently enabling and perpetuating varied forms of IPV. Scott (2023) raises critically important questions regarding the ethical and professional responsibility of financial institutions to recognize forms of IPV as financial abuse and to put in place policies and practices to mitigate this form of systemic harm.

The third paper broadens the scope of examination and explores the intersection between digital and non-digital experiences of violence in the context of today's blurring of work-life boundaries. Hearn et al. (2023) focused on examining the ethical challenges raised for organizations and decision-makers and explore the conceptual and theoretical dimensions of digital IPV. Each of these three papers provide important insights into the link between IPV and

business ethics in ways that we found thought provoking and beneficial to researchers and practitioners.

In an opening essay for a special issue, editors often describe in detail the papers themselves and provide insights about how they are interconnected. We will take a different path in this essay and instead focus on the knowledge generated about IPV and business scholarship through the process of enacting the special issue. At a broad level, our experiences in recruiting, receiving, and reviewing papers made evident to us a set of distinctions that demonstrated the potential breadth of business ethics-based IPV research. Specifically, we found two meaningful distinctions in this scholarship, with one distinction focused on the conceptualization of ethics and the other distinction focused on the assumed role of the organization. From this we developed a conceptual framework for the analysis of this research. As shown in Fig. 1, the *y*-axis differentiates between the type of ethics lens that is applied (justice/fairness; ethics of care) and the *x*-axis highlights differences in the type of organizational responsibility that is assumed (responsibility to the firm/market; responsibility to the broader socio-political-economic environment). The submitted papers, both those that were accepted and those that did not proceed to publication, helped us envision this general framework.

We offer this conceptual framework with multiple goals in mind: to provide a schema to map the research and the assumptions underlying the research; to spark reflection of the possibilities and limitations of each approach and encourage movement across the approaches; to reveal multiple pathways for complicating our thinking to generate additional research insights.

First, it provides a schematic for scholars to categorize their own work. In a subsequent section of this essay, we categorize the papers presented in the special issue within our framework. This encourages authors to recognize their own assumptions and reflect upon their limitations. This recognition of assumptions parallels the experience for members of our editorial team as we enacted the task of creating this special issue.

Our editorial team contains researchers with different assumptions about the role of organizations in society, differences in theoretical frameworks for interpreting IPV, varied definitions of business ethics, and expertise in different research methodologies. Naming and critically interrogating our own ontological and epistemological assumptions and approaches was a challenging and eye-opening process for us. Through discussion and debate, and as we moved forward through the special issue journey together, we became more distinctly aware of how these foundational assumptions and approaches shaped our interpretations of IPV research and our understanding of the potential impact of the findings. This collective reflection has been a key insight for each of us during this process.

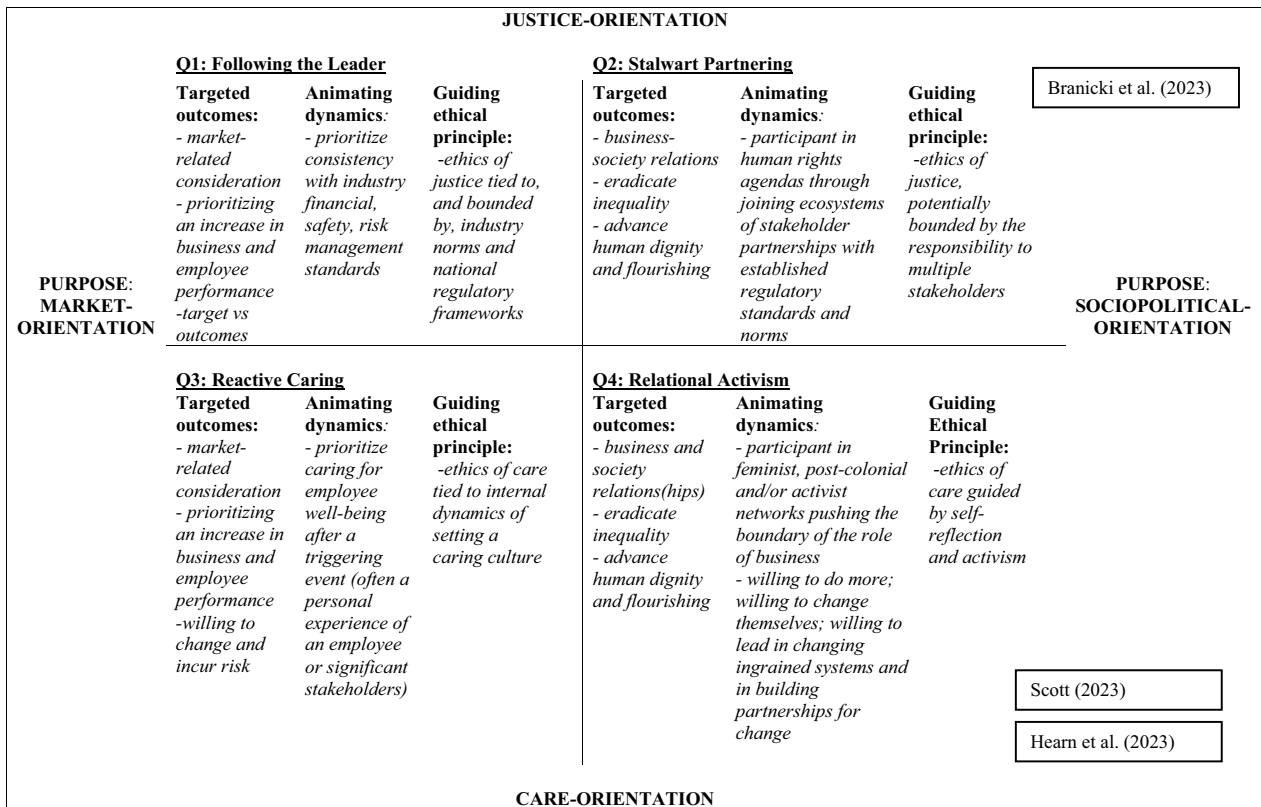


Fig. 1 Business responsibilities: framework of purpose and principle

This insight also encouraged the editorial team to recognize how reluctant each of us is to venture into the other quadrants of this framework that are less familiar to our training and paradigmatic starting points. It is difficult to let go of fundamental assumptions like those outlined in our framework. This leads us to a second reason for sharing this framework. We believe the framework can be useful to all authors who contributed to this special issue—both those whose papers were accepted and those whose were not. Indeed, as we reflected upon papers that were rejected, we could see that some authors struggled to expand their thinking around IPV. Our special issue involved an intersection of three areas of research (IPV, business, ethics), each of which comes with strong normative history. For many of us, it is difficult to embrace this complexity and loosen our fundamental assumptions as we undertake interdisciplinary work.

To give an example, a common challenge we found as we reviewed papers was that some authors had trouble embracing an ethics framework around IPV, focusing instead on legal and policy components from the organizational perspective without considerations of the ethical dynamics and dimensions relating to social justice and care. Another common challenge was a tendency to present a reactive case study based in a specific empirical example, without

consideration of broader more systemic factors that create and perpetuate hierarchies of power and societal patterns of gender-based violence. A third challenge included research that adopted more critical perspectives such as those opposing the overarching realities of the neo-liberal market. These papers often attempted to focus on the dangers and evils of current corporate HR systems without considerations of possible intermediate solutions applicable by businesses today. Although papers aligned with each approach are inherently useful and important, the recognition and delineation of the underlying assumptions were largely missing as was the acknowledgement of limitations emerging from the specific starting points. Our hope is that our framework will spark more explicit and intentional reflection on the possibilities derived from and limitations inherent to the different (equally valid) ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions.

A third reason for sharing the framework is that it demonstrates a pathway to additional research insights. In the proposed framework each quadrant is attached to all others and each axis exists on a continuum, so there are multiple pathways for complicating our thinking by engaging in thought experiments and innovative research approaches through relaxing our research assumptions, regardless of where we start. In that way, the framework can signal what is possible,

and our hope is that it can encourage us (individually and collectively) to cultivate interdisciplinary and inter-methodological work that expands our research questions and the breadth and depth of our impact. In the spirit of cultivating evidence-based and research-informed pathways forward for not only exploring the boundaries of ethical enquiry, but also offering solutions, bridges across paradigms are necessary.

A Framework Business Responsibility

In this paper we develop a framework, presented in Fig. 1, that identifies two distinctions in the business responsibility scholarship, with one distinction focused on the assumed role of the organization (responsibility to the firm/market; responsibility to the broader socio-political-economic environment), and the second focused on the approach to conceptualizing ethics (justice/fairness; ethics of care). We apply this framework to IPV and Business Responsibility, however, it could equally be applied to business responsibility in other arenas.

Primary Responsibility: Market Versus Sociopolitical Orientation (x-Axis)

The responsibilities of business vis-à-vis stakeholders have been examined in a multitude of ways, not least of which have been explored in the body of work regarding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Such considerations, at the broadest level, are very much aligned with debates concerning the overall nature and scope of corporate responsibilities in terms of the firms' intended primary outcome. These debates are long standing in the CSR literature (Crane et al., 2008; Garriga & Mele, 2004; Jamali & Karam, 2018), and often are fuelled by fundamental differences in the basic understanding of the nature and scope of business responsibilities and ultimately the nature and scope of the relationship between business and society (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2001).

Working with this dimension, a pivotal defining point arises regarding the ways in which IPV policies and practices can (or should) be integrated into the firm's understanding of their social responsibilities and in what ways does not attending to IPV serve as a breach of the responsibilities toward shareholders and the profit motive (Friedman, 1970) or of the "social contract between business and the society in which it operates" (Ang & Leong, 2000, p. 18). To this end, the x-axis in the framework varies from the position that the responsibilities of the organization with regard to IPV should be driven entirely or predominately by responsibilities toward shareholders and the profit motive (named here as market orientation) to the position that responsibilities with regard to IPV should

be driven entirely or predominately by the social contract between business and the society (named here as socio-political orientation). Implicit in this continuum is the notion that these positions are ideal types and that organizations and stakeholders do not adhere to one position at the exclusion of the other, but vary internally including over location and time.

Underlying Guiding Ethical Principle: Care Versus Justice Orientation (y Axis)

Guiding ethical principles that foster management practices and governance models can be grounded in justice-based ethical perspectives, or in contrast, based on reflections on responsibility, relationships, and experience contextualized within social and political systems (Spence, 2016). Such considerations at the broadest level are aligned with debates concerning moral orientations that contributes to human dignity and emancipation and, in juxtaposition, that perpetuate hegemonic norms and structures, and thereby the oppression and subordination of women (see Benhabib, 1985).

As a guiding ethical principle, an ethic of care can be more or less critical and more or less grounded in relational ontologies (Nelson, 2004) and relational epistemologies (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). Working with relational ontologies and epistemologies, a relational ethics of care perspective understands human subjectivity as formed in socio-political situated, embodied relations with others. Thus universalist, substitutionalist moral theories of justice, in their defense of a hypothetical (white, western, abled male) human, do not attend to the needs of the divergent, multiple humans. Instead, difference should be regarded as a starting point for reflection and action (Benhabib, 1985) and care rather than being merely a private individual act should also be considered as public, collective act.

Likewise, justice as an ethical perspective can vary in its criticality. Rhodes (2016, p. 450) posits that the concept of organizational justice, as depicted in social sciences, is divorced from its philosophical normative roots and, furthermore, is a "a thin veil of neo-liberal political instrumentalism which renders justice secondary to the market". That is, despite its claim to "descriptive orientation" (e.g. Colquitt et al., 2013, p. 4), its prescriptions shine through in the focus of this scholarship on the manner in which organizational justice can enhance organizational and employee performance (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 2007). In contrast, thicker notions of justice are employed in business ethics, for example in stakeholder theory (Phillips, 2003), and more recently in the burgeoning literature on business and human rights (Gutierrez-Huerter et al., 2021; Miklos, 2019) that focuses explicitly on systemic activities such as stakeholder deliberation, stakeholder governance, and labor rights.

A Framework Business Responsibility Applied to IPV

Based on the two-dimensions outlined, we develop a framework to conceptualize IPV and business responsibility. We identify four distinct approaches (quadrants), as shown in Fig. 1, that map both the breadth of responsibility orientation of the IPV policy or practices and the animating ethical principle. Together, they ask whether the policies/practices are designed with the more macro-institutional level in mind thereby potentially leading to broader socio-developmental influence (thereby generating longer term possibilities for gender-justice in the business-society relationship), or with more of an organizational- and individual-level focus providing internal HR policy parameters that aim to safeguard individual rights. Each of the four quadrants speaks a different language, maps different business responsibilities, and identifies different realistic parameters of effective policy development and practice implementation.

Q1: Business as Following the Leader

Quadrant 1 represents business responsibilities understood as targeted towards outcomes that prioritize sustaining or increasing firm and employee performance and are informed by thin organizationally based notions of justice, thus depicted here as *following rather than leading*. Any review of IPV research in the business and management literature would find that many papers fall within this quadrant, wherein organizations are addressing IPV as an issue to be managed in the pursuit of competitive advantage (e.g., through reduced costs, through higher productivity). Reasons for the relatively higher level of interest for IPV research aligned with quadrant 1 may have to do with the growing body of evidence to suggest the serious negative impact of IPV on the employer, co-worker, and victim/survivor-employee relationships and productivity (e.g., Deen et al., 2021; Garcia et al., 2017; Tolentino et al., 2017). As with other forms of competitive advantage, the assumption is that the firm that “leads best” in managing IPV will be followed by others who wish to gain the same organizational benefits. Research in this quadrant, which tends to be both empirical and positivist in nature has been helpful in getting organizational managers to recognize IPV as a business-related problem. However, this research also has contributed to a narrative that IPV matters because it affects the firm’s bottom line. Based on these studies, questions about effective strategies to handle ‘spillover’ of IPV into the workplace are increasingly a subject for debate, but there has been less discussion as to the nature of the employer’s responsibilities beyond its own self-interest.

From within this quadrant, the challenge for organizations is to trace and define the realistic parameters of their responsibilities with regards to IPV, and to tease apart the

nuanced intricacies of effective corporate policy development and implementation (de Jonge, 2018). Hence, business would be concerned with fairness-based policies and practices that are least disruptive to firm and employee performance and that create mechanisms that are aligned with health and safety standards and the fundamentals of basic employee rights. From this perspective, the realistic parameters of organizational responsibilities vis-à-vis IPV, are implicitly tied to individual and organizational consequences while maintaining a thin notion of justice.

At the individual level, these parameters are shaped by market considerations relating to managing employees, both victim/survivors and co-workers, and the reputation of the firm in the eyes of current and potential employees. For example, a range of employer benefits (e.g. productivity, retention) and costs (e.g. absenteeism, worker replacement, health care, insurance, safety) for employing victim/survivors have been empirically demonstrated (Johnson & Indvik, 1999; O’Leary-Kelly et al., 2008; Reeves & O’Leary-Kelly, 2007). Of note, increased costs to employers have also been shown to be associated with employing perpetrators (Rothman & Corso, 2008).

At the firm level, the parameters are shaped by market considerations tied to the performance of the firm, including the possible impact IPV responses could have on financial measures, sustainability measures, and other performance indicators. Such related measures include those focused on social performance and local legitimacy in the eyes of firm stakeholders/regulatory groups, corporate reputation in the larger market, and variant business opportunities and investments.

Despite not attracting scholarly attention as yet, the connections between IPV and business risk have not escaped the attention of international actuarial and consulting firm Milliman who have coined the terms “GBV-aware investing” to describe the incorporation of prevention and mitigation of GBV (gender-based violence) into assessing investment risk and are developing a tool purportedly to measure such risk (Dobiac & Kolundzija, 2022). Across the existing research taking this approach is the assumption that corporate responsibility is limited to value creation for the firm with minimal, if any, debate about normative underpinnings of this position.

In sum, this quadrant signifies a *following* approach to business responses and responsibilities to IPV. Businesses will follow formal and informal norms and standards in order to comply with expectations of fairness and equality and will do so in as much as these follow market-based expectations and considerations. We recognize the contribution the existing work-related IPV scholarship in this quadrant has made to this domain, but also note that this research stream has not yet engaged with ethical enquiry.

Q2: Business as Stalwart Partnering

Quadrant 2 represents business responsibilities understood as targeted towards outcomes that prioritize socio-political and economic development, and sustainable and equitable futures, and are informed by thick conceptualization of justice that emphasize partnerships with societal and governmental actors, referred to here as *stalwart partnering*. Emergent research in this area may arise from transnational efforts spearheaded by intergovernmental and international nongovernmental initiatives such as those lead by UN Women, and other such entities increasingly calling for multistakeholder ecosystems to respond to various global challenges and to meet the 2030 sustainable development goals.

In response to the growing body of evidence to suggest the high prevalence and serious negative impact of IPV at the community and societal level, there is increased debate about effective socio-political strategies to address IPV and other forms of GBV. Businesses are acknowledged as influential social and political actors (in addition to economic actors) and are therefore identified as significant institutions in the network of institutional stakeholders that need to take action to address this urgent issue. Importantly, the state and business are understood as interconnected, with the state playing an important role by creating legal, regulatory and public policy conditions that enable business to protect human rights (see United Nations, 2011).

Principles of fairness and rights are operationalized in many standards and guidelines for business responsibilities and business-related protections across localized jurisdictions (e.g. national equal employment opportunity legislation) and at international level (e.g. International Labour Organization's fundamental principles and rights at work). There is a recognition that the insufficiency of state based legal protections for IPV victim/survivors mean that additional legal protections are necessary or organizations need to go beyond minimum legal requirements to fulfill ethical responsibilities (Katz et al., 2017). Thus, the animating logic for business as *stalwart partnering* concerns ways to not only provide enriching environments for physical and financial capital, but also human and social capital through corporate engagement in national development agendas, engaging in transnational conventions such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and Sustainable Development Goal 5.

From within this quadrant, the challenge for organizations is to trace and define the realistic parameters of business responsibilities with regards to global initiatives and local efforts relating to IPV. For instance, business commitment to uphold employees' rights to organize and be represented collectively draws trade unions into partnership with business and the state. The role of trade unions in supporting IPV victims and partnering with management in the workplace

(Wibberley et al., 2018) has been noted as part of reactive caring (see quadrant 3), however left open is the partnership of trade unions with business and government in improving legislation or developing public policy. Relevant public policy that addresses structural inequalities for women provides a basis for systemically addressing GBV generally and IPV specifically. For example, access to affordable child-care is a significant enabler for women's employment and career progression, and especially beneficial for low-income IPV victims/survivors (Showalter et al., 2021). Despite an explicit positioning of work-related IPV as embedded in social-political conditions and advocating engagement with civil society actors, research taking this approach is yet to engage with the ethical underpinnings, be these justice driven or other, for these social imperatives (see de Jonge, 2018, as an exception).

In sum, this quadrant represents a *stalwart partnering* approach on part of business with regard to their responses and responsibilities to IPV. Businesses engage with societal and governmental actors to advance human well-being and reduce inequalities.

Q3: Business as Reactive Caring

Quadrant 3 represents employer responsibilities understood as targeted towards outcomes that prioritize sustaining or increasing firm and employee performance and are informed by an ethics of care, referred to here as *reactive caring*. The animating factor of this research is often in response to a specific case of IPV that has emerged within the context of a sector or organization (e.g., Liz Claiborne in O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2008). With attention often brought to the foreground due to pressing efforts to react and respond, this quadrant encompasses the documentation of efforts and actions taken in response to a triggering event. Rather than respond to the serious negative impact of IPV on the employer, co-worker, and victim/survivor-employee as followers of industry standards or regulatory frameworks (c.f. quadrant 1), this approach sees businesses as responding to the spillover effects of IPV on victim/survivor employees and co-workers with an internal focus on the organization.

At the individual level focus is on "effective workplace responses" with regard to direct and specific support for victim-survivors. For example, research has shown that many employees received IPV-related information from employers and/or unions (MacGregor et al., 2017). Accessibility of resources and accommodations in the workplace (e.g., provision of leave or flexible work arrangements) and safety measures (e.g., specific workplace precautions) have been shown (in their absence and their presence) to impact victim/survivors.

At the co-worker or organizational level "effective workplace responses" are focused on creating supportive

environments through training, cultural change, and development of specific IPV policies and protocols (Glass et al., 2016; Kulkarni & Ross, 2010). Working from this approach, strong prescriptions are derived for policy and practice; typical are those outlined by Giesbrecht (2020, p. 17):

“Accommodations must be made for survivors who need to access services related to IPV during their scheduled work time. ... Organizations must work with individual survivors to develop and implement a workplace safety plan... Managers, security teams, and others should periodically review workplace security measures.”

Yet, as with quadrant 1 and quadrant 2, the normative reasoning for these imperatives remains either unstated (e.g., Giesbrecht, 2020) or with an allusion to positive effects (Glass et al., 2016) or making a difference (Garcia et al., 2017) yet without debate regarding the nature and limitations of the responsibilities of business. What appears to be an unanswered question is what accounts for particular workplace responses being experienced by victims/survivors sometimes as helpful and other times as unhelpful in the context of the business' responsibility.

In sum, this quadrant describes businesses as taking a *reactive caring* approach in response to the impact of IPV on individual employees and their co-workers (and thus the organization). Beyond reacting to individual cases, organizations may initiate training, policy and cultural change with a predominantly internal (rather than external) focus.

Q4: Business as Relational Activism

Quadrant 4 represents employer responsibilities understood as targeted towards outcomes that prioritize socio-political and economic development and sustainable and equitable futures and are informed by an ethics of care, referred to here as *relational activism*. Research falling within this quadrant tends to adopt a more critical approach, challenging traditional beliefs of the role of businesses thereby pushing our understanding of the relationship between business and society. Importantly, this paradigm embraces both willingness to change and willingness to lead in changing the status quo.

At an organizational level, considerations focus on the manner in which experiences of work may compound experiences of IPV. IPV research has shown how constructed masculinities, which are deeply linked to work and organization, create enabling social and psychological conditions for IPV (Anderson, 2005). It has been argued by Hearn & Collinson, (2018) that “mainstream organizations, or key parts of them, can often be understood as ‘men’s organizations’, places of ‘men’s organizing’, full of unnamed, usually nongender-conscious, ‘men’s groups’”. Thus violence, being perceived in much of western culture as masculine

behavior, becomes one means by which men can perform masculinity and enabled under conditions where highly masculine behavior is legitimized (Hearn, 1994) or challenged (Anderson, 2005). Idealized or threatened masculinities have been shown to be related to IPV in a number of ways (e.g., loss of job, low levels of income or unemployment, female partner out earns the male) (Anderson, 2009; Stark, 2007). It seems clear that there is a relationship between the institutional patriarchy and IPV, but the nature of this relationship is highly debatable (e.g., do men attempt to dominate intimate partners when patriarchy weakens as proposed by Stark, 2007?) (Anderson, 2009). Research in this quadrant inevitably then seeks to address the organizational layers of masculinities and how those systemic forces uphold the impact of IPV on the various stakeholders.

At an individual level, there is a willingness to question and situate taken for granted assumptions regarding work and IPV. For instance, it often stated and has been shown that employment can be empowering for IPV victims by increasing self-esteem and/or financial independence. However, research in this quadrant takes a critical and nuanced approach addresses such a “given”. Krigel and Benjamin (2020, p. 944), for example, find that conflict between neo-liberal values in the workplace conflict with patriarchal values in home life can result in IPV victims/survivors needing to “act cautiously, apply strategic planning, read maps carefully and maneuver constantly between the parties to minimize possible economic and personal damage”. To offer “quality” employment to IPV survivor/victims, jobs need to provide no penetration of IPV into the employment space, control over one’s own income and a sense of skill recognition, dimensions that “reflect the blurred boundaries between the intimate/domestic/private and employment/public spheres (Krigel & Benjamin, 2020, p. 944).

In sum, this quadrant demands *relational activism* from businesses to take responsibility for addressing IPV. Organizations should be self-reflexive with regards to their role in the problem (e.g. neo-liberal ideologies, highly masculinized cultures) not just the solution. This approach recognizes that the diverse experiences of victims/survivors require particular and nuanced engagement. Furthermore, organizations need to step up as active participants in political, social, and economic structures and systems to reduce oppression and promote equality.

Developing Research on IPV and Business Ethics

This special issue includes three selected contributions in response to our Call for Papers. As stated earlier, the question of what organizations *should* do about IPV as it impacts business organizations is integrally connected to ethical

inquiry. Of note, only one previous paper related specifically to IPV and business has been published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* (de Jonge, 2018) and little else has been published about IPV and business related to ethics. Overall, the debate as to what the role and responsibilities of organizations are in response to IPV that affects the workplace is in its infancy. The vast majority of previous theory-based work-related IPV research to date is focused on the individual level and not at the organizational or societal level thereby limiting previous discussions regarding business responsibility for IPV.

The paper by Scott (2023), “Financial abuse in a banking context: Why and how financial institutions can respond,” focuses upon financial abuse as a specific form of IPV and examines financial abuse in the context of victim/survivor interactions with financial institutions and those institutions’ unintended role in perpetuating GBV. Scott argues that financial institutions play an indispensable role in society’s response to financial abuse due to the intimate relationship they have with their customers. This paper sits in quadrant 4 of our framework for IPV and business responsibility as Scott conceives of a “broad” and proactive banking view of the systemic harm that financial institutions potentially reenact. Such a proactive view of banking would require that bank employees who interact with customers should at a minimum have an awareness of how coercive control may present in a banking setting. Ideally, there is an opportunity for financial institutions to help their customers understand and identify if they may be a victim/survivor of financial abuse and provide support. With regard to financial abuse, this model has applicability to any consumer-directed institution that deals in economic resources (e.g., mobile phone, utilities). Such institutions that provide economic resources for daily life are necessarily situated in and invested in the communities in which they operate and provide the resources for an individual’s basic needs. Such a broad view of the responsibility of financial institutions pushes the boundaries of the role of business and seeks to minimize consumer vulnerability that inhibits a victim/survivor’s ability to function and indeed flourish in their surroundings.

Hearn et al. (2023) highlights digital IPV and ethical enquiry in “The spread of digital intimate partner violence: Ethical challenges for business, workplaces, employers, and management.” In response to the blurring of the public and private spheres and the advancement of seamless technologies with 24/7 availability and resistance to boundaries, this paper details numerous ethical challenges raised for organizations and their management/employees by digital IPV. Digital IPV can be quite pervasive in the workplace while at the same time being far less visible than non-digital IPV and is distinguished by not being bound by space, time or other boundaries. The authors propose both ethical challenges and guidelines for organizational best practices in

relation to digital IPV and workplaces. This paper, also then, is situated in quadrant 4 of our proposed framework for IPV and business responsibility and holds that digital IPV can be exacerbated by organizational cultures that operate from patriarchal norms and when clear, ethical policies and procedures for dealing with digital IPV within the organization do not exist. This paper contributes a proactive organizational approach to creating digital IPV policies and procedures that prioritize privacy, human dignity and safety.

Thus, two of the papers we selected in response to our Call for Papers are situated in the Relational Leadership (quadrant 4) quadrant, embracing both a sociopolitical orientation and ethics of care. A key animating dynamic of this quadrant is the willingness of the organization to do more, to change, and to lead in changing systemic structures of oppression.

Branicki et al. (2023) contribute “Corporate Responses to Intimate Partner Violence” and conceptualize IPV responsiveness as a specific manifestation of corporate social responsibility and provide evidence that organizations’ institutional and stakeholder environments impact their IPV responsiveness. In particular, the authors theorize IPV responsiveness on the basis of caring in organizations centered on satisfying employees’ best interests, needs and valuing their contributions. This empirical and longitudinal study asserts that while IPV responsiveness is still at an overall low level, ethically IPV disclosure should not be required for the victim/survivor to experience organizational support and avoid “double violence”. Therefore, again IPV awareness and organizational support takes on critical importance. The findings of this study highlighted factors such as corporate visibility and availability of financial resources that are strongly associated both with a business’ openness to accepting broader corporate social responsibilities and with IPV responsiveness. The authors also call for the need for organizations to embrace a heightened level of responsibility for IPV responsiveness given the overall low level of IPV responsiveness within their sample. Situated in the Stalwart Partnering (quadrant 2) quadrant, this paper embraces a thick conception of justice and a sociopolitical orientation. Therefore, all three of the papers we selected for IPV and business ethical enquiry in this special issue adopted a sociopolitical orientation. This does not mean, however, that we think work-related IPV academic research with a market orientation is inferior to that with a sociopolitical orientation. As we will discuss further below, it is imperative that work-related IPV research advance in all four quadrants.

Importantly, each of these three featured papers call attention to the negative impact organizations can have on IPV victims-survivors. The Scott paper on financial abuse in a banking context explicitly addresses the potential harm of financial institutions via her theorizing of

consumer vulnerability and systemic harm with an emphasis on how these institutions can unknowingly perpetuate IPV and economic harm. The Hearn et al. paper on digital IPV explicitly states that harm can be exacerbated by lack of explicit policies/procedures and patriarchal norms in the workplace. Branicki et al. conceptualize IPV responsiveness in a way that highlights the “double violence” issue that can accompany disclosure in the workplace and state that victim/survivor disclosure should not be required for organizational support to be present.

Furthermore, self-reflexivity, or having an ongoing conversation with one’s whole self throughout the research process, is embraced in each of these three papers and has also been embraced by this editorial team. Self-reflexivity is particularly important in the context of phenomenological research that seeks to understand the essence and experience of a violent phenomenon such as IPV (Gilgun, 2008). Scott details researcher reflexivity at length in her financial abuse paper as a requirement of qualitative research, and her relationship to this paper is her professional and academic training in finance and how economic resources influence individual behavior and lived experience. She places this training and research interest in the context of unequal power dynamics for victims/survivors in their intimate relationships and how that inequity is exacerbated by unequal financial resources.

The team of authors on the Hearn et al. paper on digital IPV have training and experience in feminist and gender studies in business management, violence studies, and technology studies and collaborated from their various vantage points to detail the ethical challenges for businesses arising from digital IPV and to propose proactive and ethical responses to those challenges. The Branicki et al. paper on corporate IPV responsiveness is less overt in describing their team’s self-reflexivity but the authors take the position that gender equity is the “unfinished business of our time” and conceptualize IPV responsiveness as an explicit form of corporate social responsibility. In considering the values and assumptions these authors brought to their research focused upon work-related IPV and ethics, it is no surprise that all three papers embraced a sociopolitical orientation that also engaged deeply with business ethics. As noted in our introduction, many authors struggled to embrace an ethics framework around IPV including consideration of broader systemic factors that uphold GBV.

The editorial team, as mentioned earlier, included researchers with different assumptions about the role of organizations in society, differences in theoretical frameworks for interpreting IPV, varied definitions of business ethics, and expertise in different research methodologies. We muse on these differences as we draw this special issue to its conclusion.

Conclusion

Taken together, the experience of editing this special issue has been one of reflection and learning. Quite quickly in the process we were faced with a number of critical questions posed through our discussions and debates. A particularly challenging question concerned whether we had, individually or collectively, an implicit assumption about a “better” or “best way” of doing IPV research in order to advance business ethics research in the area. Fundamental to this arose the question as to whether any of our assessments of core research questions or framings were value-laden, and if so, how? Through these challenging conversations, the importance of working with a multi-/trans-disciplinary team with varied paradigmatic commitments also became quickly apparent. In response, we developed a theoretical framework to conceptualize the range of research possibilities to address IPV and business responsibility. With this framework, we challenged our interpretations of the value of findings and of the impact of work categorized in the four different quadrants. We also challenged ourselves to reflect on our own scholarly work, and scholar-activist efforts in the area of gender-based violence. We believe that this framework can be fruitfully applied to other areas of business responsibilities.

Although many of the questions raised remain important reflection points in each of our own learning journeys, one thing is clear—all hands are needed on deck. That is, there is undoubtedly a need to view and explore work-related IPV from different perspectives and approaches in order to propose viable solutions and hopeful imaginaries for the future. There is also a responsibility to explore how we can borrow methods, methodologies, and epistemological stances (if only for a thought experiment) to learn from each other and appreciate different approaches, without invoking value judgments to the point of excluding any single approach. In this spirit, it is clear that each quadrant “speaks” a different language and to different audiences. Where quadrant 1 (follow the leader) forces us to think and propose policies and practices in a manner that is familiar and actionable for businesses in the employment landscape, quadrant 4 (relational activism) pushes us to stretch the boundaries of thinking in ways that are more complicated and expansive. Each are vitally important, in different ways and for different audiences to usher in change.

We hope that a key takeaway from this this special issue will, therefore, be that research in one quadrant is not “better” than research in another, but that working in tandem and even working collaboratively between is seen as a valuable endeavor. Indeed, we assert that working across paradigmatic and disciplinary lines is imperative in order

to (1) recognize the benefits and limitations of our own work and that of others, (2) explore different ways organizations can think about and enact greater responsibility for responding to and proactively preventing forms of IPV, (3) juxtapose different kinds and levels of business IPV responsibilities so that the radical, the moderate and any responses that are in between are acknowledged and made possible, and finally (4) foster innovative pathways forward that are only made possible in the interstitial spaces between the four quadrants. No matter the approach, research on work-related IPV in business and management research is too scarce and is arguably urgent. This special issue also incorporated ethical enquiry into that equation. Work-related IPV research is indeed challenging and necessarily requires an ethical research standard of its own. In the context of actual workplaces, conversations about IPV remain challenging anywhere in the world. The noticeable paucity of IPV research, fueled by the discomfort of and resistance to conversations about IPV, must be tackled head on. Our call to action is for business ethics researchers and practitioners to embrace the discomfort and the challenges, to explore and unpack the nuances and to push forward the possibilities for effective and responsible interventions and preventions.

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