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Police Responses to Domestic Violence and Public Perception

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence, also known as, intimate partner violence (IPV), has become an epidemic in the United States. This research is intended to explain the types of IPV, describe the effects of severe IPV, look at the change in public perceptions of IPV situations, and explore the police responses to such situations. Students at UNLV participated in the “Police Responses to Calls for Service” survey, that was created to determine the public’s level of awareness of IPV situations and whether that awareness increases support for police policies in responding to intimate partner violence calls.

BACKGROUND

- Domestic violence is now being referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV) because abuse can continue even after the partners are no longer living together.
- About 24 women and men are victimized by an intimate partner each minute, equaling about 12 million victims every year (CDC, 2012).
- In 2007, intimate partner homicides (IPH) accounted for 14% of all homicides in the nation. Of those deaths, 70% of the victims were female (CDC, 2012).
- Nevada has consistently led the nation in negative IPV statistics. In 2010, the national average for women killed by men was 1.22 per 100,000, but Nevada’s average was over double the national average with 2.62 per 100,000 (Violence Policy Center, 2012).
- IPV can consist of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as, threatening or stalking behaviors. These behaviors do not appear in isolation but typically occur on a continuum and can either include one or more types of abuse (CDC, 2012).
- Physical abuse is the most commonly recognized type of abuse in IPV situations and some would consider it the most severe abuse (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008). Almost 15% of women and just less than 4% of men have experienced rape, physical harm, or stalking in an intimate partner relationship (Black et al., 2011).
- Intimate partner violence has been linked to many physical, psychological and emotional traumas such as: severe injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression (Campbell, 1995).
- Although IPV refers to the violence between adult partners, children are rarely spared from the violence (Stanley, Miller, Foster, & Thomson, 2010). Every year about 3 million children are exposed to domestic violence in their households (Reynolds, Wallace, Hill, Weist, & Nabors, 2000).
- Police responses to IPV have also changed due to rising awareness. Many departments have created special divisions for IPV situations.
- Over the years, various danger and lethality assessments have been created to help address the dangerousness and lethality found in IPV cases. These assessments were intended to determine the probability of re-victimization, future lethality, or both.
- The Danger Assessment (DA) was originally created by Jacquelyn Campbell in 1986. The purpose of the DA was to predict and prevent future physical violence in intimate partner relationships (Campbell, 1986).
- The Lethality Assessment Program-Maryland Model (LAP) is derived from three of Campbell’s research studies on IPV danger assessments (MNADV, 2005). This tool was created to assess lethality in IPV situations. The LAP is unique in design because it was specifically created for first responders (i.e. law enforcement) to IPV calls.

PURPOSE

Currently there are 14 states that have implemented the LAP for IPV first responders: Maryland, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Vermont (MNADV, 2012). The uniqueness of this program is that victims are immediately offered help on scene from police or first responders. Because of this feature, almost 33% of the IPV victims that were screened as high risk for future violence or lethality received help services immediately (MNADV, 2012). According to Campbell, by taking advantage of IPV shelters and services, victims can reduce their risk of future violence and lethality by 60% (1995). This research is intended to explore public knowledge about IPV and examine the public’s support for new police policies directing officer responses to IPV calls for service. Furthermore, this research will seek to connect the relationship between public awareness and support of police actions .

METHODS

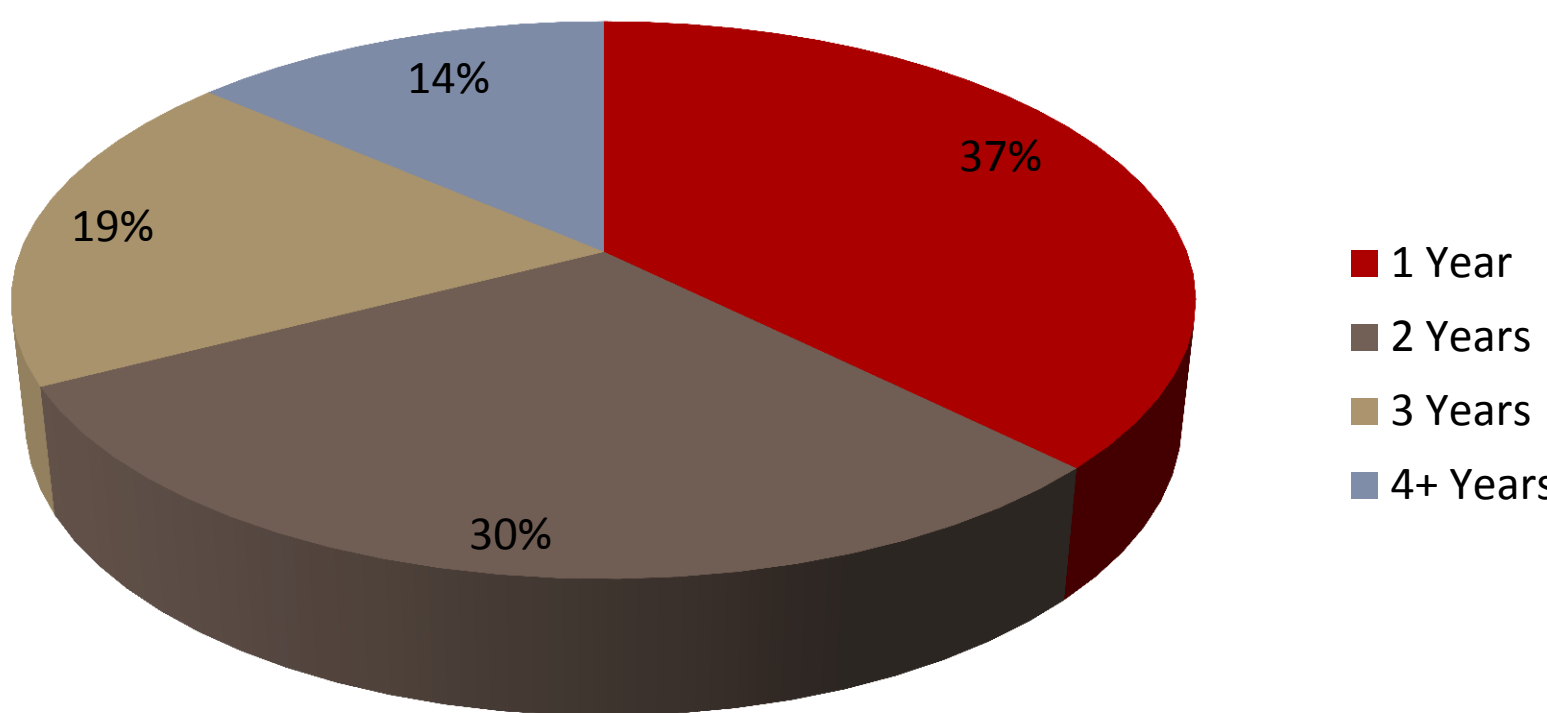
- The “Police Responses to Calls for Service” survey was created by Dr. M. Alexis Kennedy for the Law and Social Issues Research Lab. The lab is located in the Criminal Justice Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. IRB was granted in the Spring of 2012 (protocol number 1110-3932) and collection of data started immediately. The survey was designed to measure support for current police policies related to IPV responses and measure student awareness of the issue.
- Over the course of one spring semester and one fall semester 521 respondents completed the “Police Responses to Calls for Service” survey. For the collection of this data a convenience sample of University of Nevada, Las Vegas college students was used. The use of UNLV students provides access to general public opinions that are, to some extent, representative of the Las Vegas population.
- The Maryland Model Lethality Assessment consists of 11 questions addressing issues of danger and lethality, plus one open ended question.
 - The first three questions on the LAP are: “1. Has he/she ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a weapon? 2. Has he/she threatened to kill you or your children? 3. Do you think he/she might try to kill you” (MNADV, 2005, “Learning to Read the Danger Signs”)? If a victim answers “yes” to any of these three questions on the assessment, an automatic response is triggered. Responding officers are to contact a local domestic violence helpline and give the phone to the victim (MNADV, 2005).
 - If the victim answers “no” to the first three questions, the officer continues with items 4-11, affirmative answers for four or more of the subsequent questions triggers the response procedure. The last question asks the victim “Is there anything else that worries you about your safety” (MNADV, 2005, “Domestic Violence Lethality Screen”)? Officers can determine whether to initiate the protocol or not depending on the victim’s response to the final question.
- In order to determine levels of agreement with the LAP, questions were taken directly from the assessment with responses measured at the ordinal level (Likert-scales). Additionally, to determine the public’s level of awareness and knowledge of domestic violence situations, scenarios were given to the participants with responses measured at the ordinal level (Likert-scales).
- The methods of analysis used for this poster were frequencies and simple correlations.
 - Female = 1
 - Male= 0

Demographics

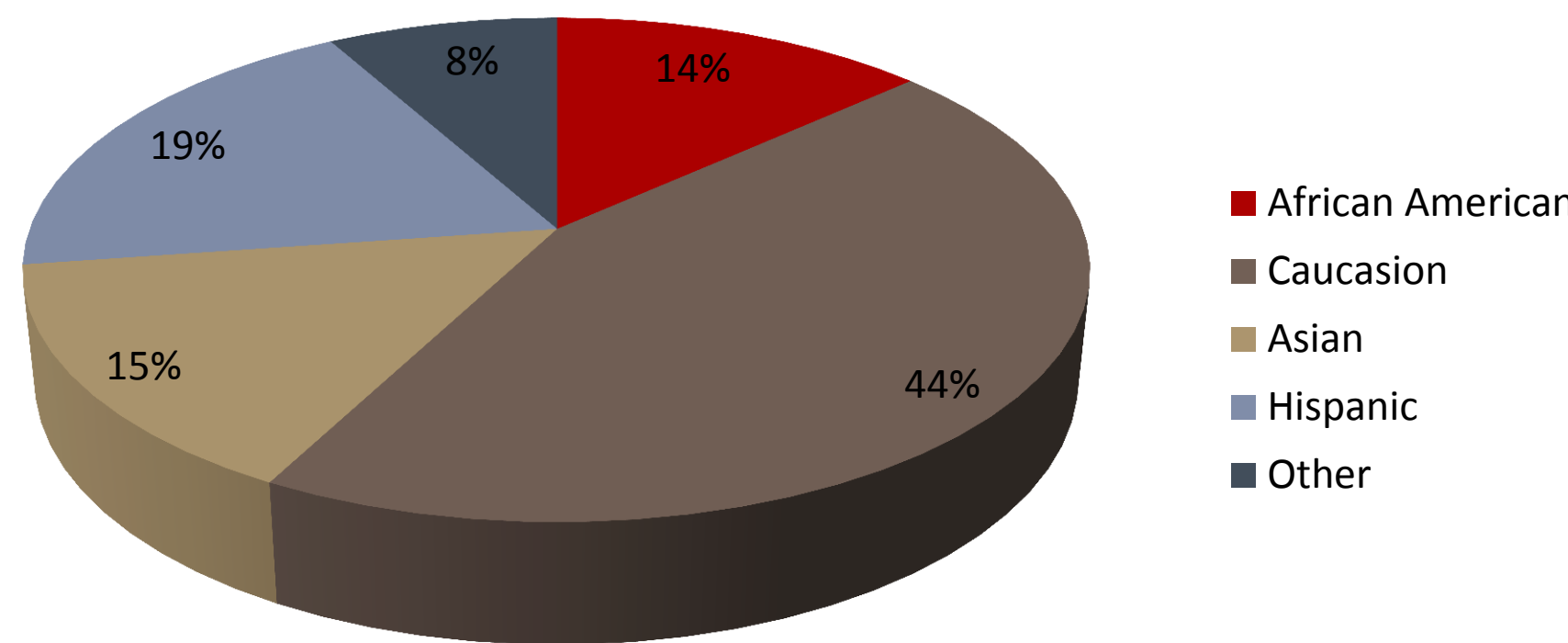
Gender

- Female: 272 (52%)
- Male: 247 (48%)

Year Enrolled in University



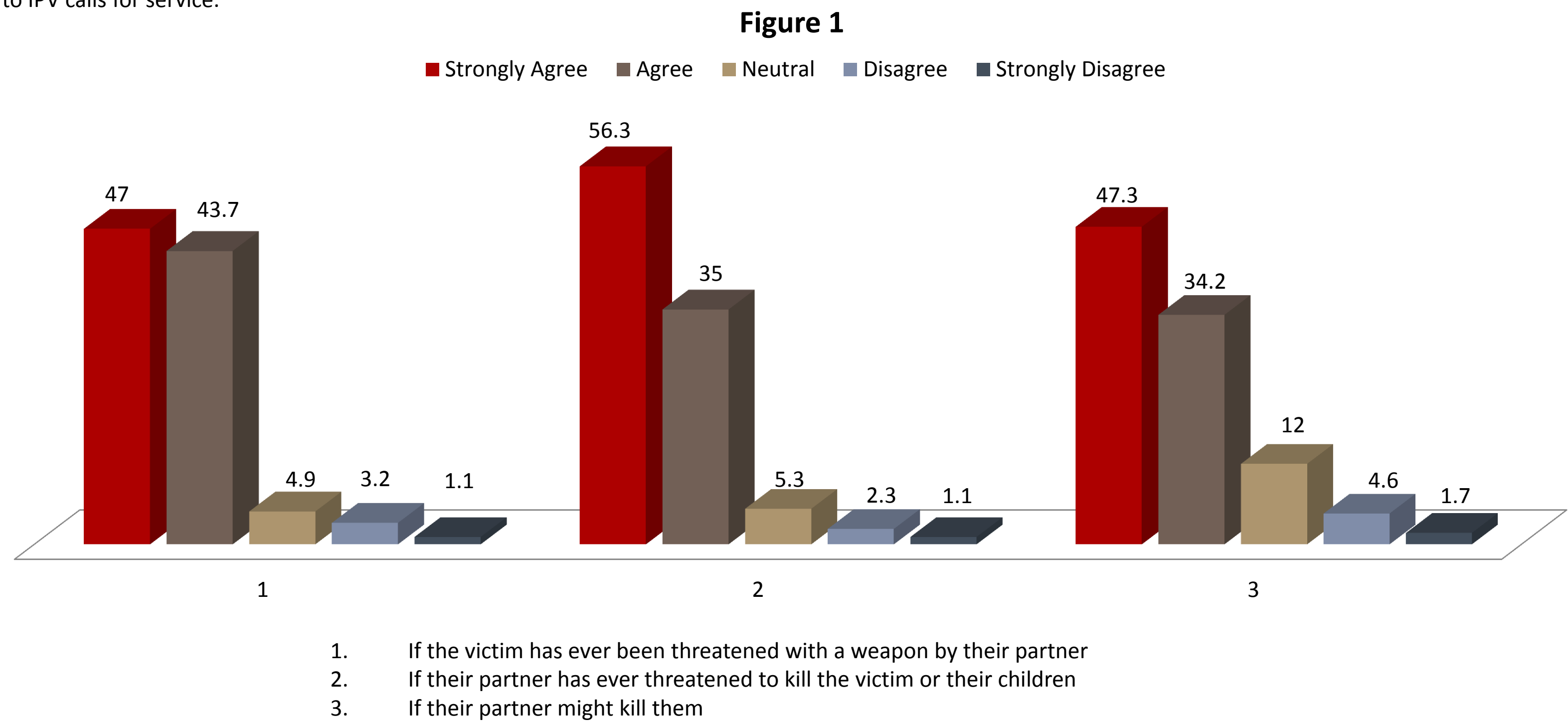
Ethnicity



RESULTS

Support for the Lethality Assessment Protocols

The “Police Responses” survey asked participants whether they agreed with the police protocol of asking the three questions in Figure 1. The majority of participants agreed that police should be required to ask such questions when responding to IPV calls for service.



Public Awareness of Domestic Violence

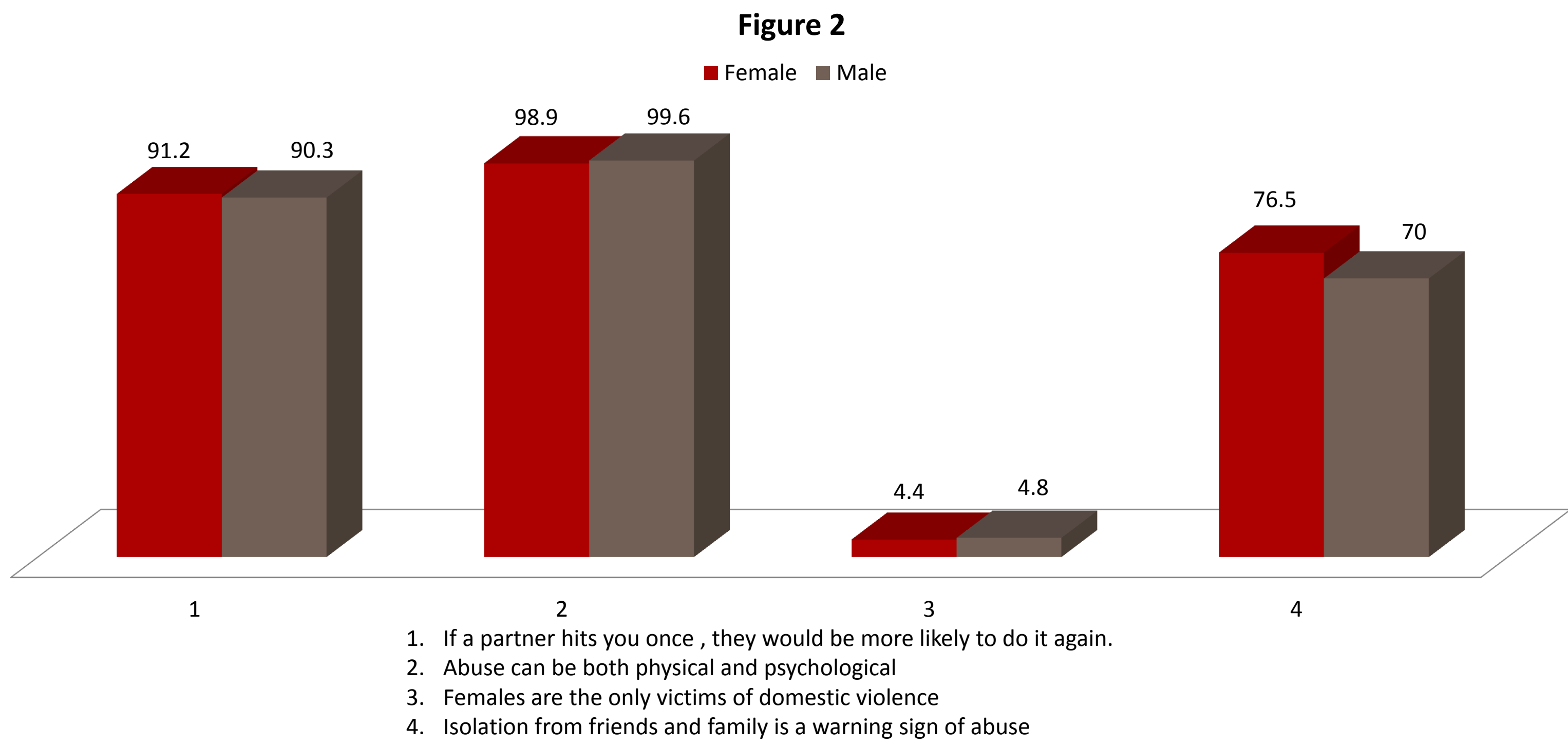
Public awareness of IPV was measured in part by asking participants about resources available to victims. The table below shows that the public feels that there are adequate resources available for victims and that are aware that victims are not always able to contact help.

	Gender (Pearson r)	Significance	Women's Mean Agreement	Men's Mean Agreement
There is adequate support for domestic violence victims	-.091	.039	3.41	3.24
Victims of domestic violence should have to contact hotline counselors	-.074	.091	3.55	3.40
Information about domestic violence is readily available to all	-.025	.568	3.37	3.31
Victims of domestic violence are always able to contact help	-.047	.282	3.15	3.03

Note: Strongly agree is 5 on a 5 point response scale. Higher means represent higher levels of agreement.

Awareness of Domestic Violence Myths

The “Police Responses” survey used domestic violence myths to further explore the level of awareness the public has about domestic violence situations. Figure 3 represents the level of agreement towards each statement by gender.



Note: Strongly agree is 5 on a 5 point response scale. Higher means represent higher levels of agreement.

Discussion

Preliminary analyses found support for current police policies based on the lethality assessment protocols adopted through out the US. Both women and men supported requiring officers to ask personal questions about IPV history in order to assess current and future risk. Where gender differences appeared were in awareness of resources available to victims. Women were more likely to disagree that there are adequate resources available to victims of IPV. Also showing differences were some but not all of the items looking at awareness of abuse. For example, women were more likely to recognize isolation as a warning sign for abuse.