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Assessing Acceptance of Violence Toward Women:

A Factor Analysis of Burt's Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale

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Abstract

The Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale (AIV) is a self-report inventory assessing beliefs about violence toward women. This study's purpose was to test the multidimensionality of the AIV. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on half a sample of 772 male participants and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the other half. EFA indicated a two-factor solution. Factors were labeled Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence. The CFA showed this model provided a good fit and was superior to the original one-factor model. Potential problems when using the single sum score and the applicability of the derived factor structure to violence research are discussed.

Keywords

Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale; factor analysis; scale construction; sexual aggression

Despite increased awareness and efforts to combat it, sexual aggression remains a problem among young adults with up to 30% of college women reporting being forced into unwanted sexual behavior (see Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004, for a recent review). One possible aid to prevention might be to delineate characteristics of men most likely to aggress against women. Based on one of the few longitudinal (10-year) studies of young men's sexual behavior, Malamuth and his colleagues (e.g., Malamuth, Heavey, & Lintz, 1993; Malamuth, Lintz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991) developed a confluence model of sexual assault, which posits that men who have a hostile, dominating attitude toward women are most likely to engage in such behavior. The Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale (AIV; Burt, 1980) emerged as an important instrument from Malamuth's research because it was one of two instruments that successfully longitudinally predicted the risk of perpetrated sexual aggression.

The AIV (Burt, 1980) is a 6-item self-report inventory designed to assess attitudes related to acceptance of the belief that force and coercion are appropriate means to gain compliance within sexual and intimate relationships. The scale was developed and published along with three other scales related to sexual attitudes (Sex Role Stereotyping, Adversarial Sexual Beliefs, and Sexual Conservatism). For the AIV, Burt originally developed 12 items on a rational basis. Based on item analysis, 6 items were retained with a reliability estimate of .58 (Cronbach's alpha). The AIV is scored as a single one-factor scale that is a sum of all 6 items; 3 items are reverse scored such that higher scores reflect greater acceptance. Table 1 shows the scale items.

The original purpose of the AIV was to relate acceptance of interpersonal violence to rape myths. The results of Burt's (1980) study showed that of all the scales she developed, the AIV had the highest correlation with rape-myth beliefs. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) argued that the AIV actually measures acceptance of violence specific to women as opposed to interpersonal violence in general, and this acceptance is part of the larger construct of hostility toward women. As a specific measure of acceptance of violence toward women, the AIV has been used in several studies representing a range of different outcomes (e.g., Abbey & McAuslan, 2004; Brecklin, 2004; Cowan & Ullman, 2006; DeGue & DiLillo, 2004; Emmers-Sommer & Allen, 1999; Hunter, Figueredo, Becker, & Malamuth, 2007; Kalof, 1999; Lane & Knowles, 2000; Lopez, George, & Davis, 2007; Mosher & Danoff-Burg, 2005; Vega & Malamuth, 2007). These studies have used the AIV to predict outcomes, such as sexual assault, sexual coercion, domestic violence, pornography, interpretation of sexual cues, and examination of predictors of self-defense class participation. Thus, it appears that the AIV is a useful and important instrument for measuring individual differences in beliefs about the acceptability of violence toward women in certain situations, and because of its brevity, it is quite easy to utilize.

Although the AIV has predictive validity and is easy to administer, it is not without limitations. Studies using the AIV tend to report modest relationships, and reported reliability coefficients are typically below .60. These issues have led some researchers to argue that the AIV may be a multidimensional scale. The fact that the content of the AIV items includes both physical and sexual violence only serves to strengthen this possibility. Therefore, the arguments for multidimensionality are not only psychometric (i.e., modest prediction and low reliability) but also conceptual (i.e., attitudes toward sexual and physical violence may be independent and represent multiple facets of hostility toward women; Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1985; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Both the psychometric and conceptual concerns have practical implications. The psychometric problems may lead to a loss of precision of measurement. The conceptual concern may lead to erroneous conclusions about the specific predictors of the various outcomes studied in that, if the AIV includes relatively independent factors, a detected relationship may be driven by only one or more than one of the factors. Using it as a unidimensional scale may lead to a false conclusion that an outcome is driven by a factor that in fact is unrelated. Unfortunately, however, little research has addressed the issue of multidimensionality in relation to the AIV.

Two studies have examined the possibility that the AIV is multidimensional by conducting factor analyses on the AIV as well as related instruments. Briere et al. (1985) factor analyzed the AIV and derived three factors, namely, Women Enjoy Sexual Violence, Acceptance of Domestic Violence, and Vengefulness (only one item). Walker, Rowe, and Quinsey (1993) factor analyzed the AIV as part of a larger factor analysis of all the scales developed by Burt (1980). Their analysis yielded three factors, two of which were similar to (with the addition of items from the other scales) Briere et al.'s (1985) factors, namely, Women Enjoy Sexual Violence and Acceptance of Domestic Violence.

Although these two studies found evidence that the AIV is a multidimensional scale, important questions remain. First, Briere et al.'s (1985) analysis yielded a factor with a single item. It is difficult to ascertain from their study whether this item tapped a separate dimension. From the Walker et al. (1993) study, this single item loaded with another AIV item on a separate scale, but given that all of Burt's other items were assessed in the same factor analysis, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the true factor structure of the AIV itself. Second, although the results of both studies were similar, neither Briere et al. (1985) nor Walker et al. (1993) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on an independent

sample to test the fit of the derived factor structures to the data, nor a test as to whether a multidimensional factor structure is a better fit than the current single factor structure.

The purpose of this study was to clarify the findings of the available research on the AIV's factor structure. A few features of this study not evident in earlier research allowed the achievement of this aim. First, this study had a large sample size that could be divided into two independent subsamples, so that cross-validation of the initial factor structure that was identified was possible. Second, single-variable (item) factors were a priori not considered as meeting criteria as factors. Overall, the primary aim of this study was to conduct both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the AIV using an adequately powered, independent sample of single, young adult men. Our aim was to determine the underlying factor structure of the AIV, test the fit of the derived factor structure to the data, and compare the derived factor structure to the original single factor structure. Based on the examination of item content and past factor-analytic studies (i.e., Briere et al., 1985), we hypothesized an underlying two-factor structure with each having three items. One factor will contain the items relevant to intimate partner violence, and the other will contain items related to sexual violence. We also hypothesized that this two-factor model would provide a better fit to the data than the original single-factor model or the null model.

Method

Participants

Participants were 772 men (aged 21 to 30) recruited from the University of North Carolina–Wilmington (UNCW) campus and surrounding community for a laboratory study of the effect of alcohol intoxication on acceptance of sexual aggression. Inclusion criteria for the sample were age 21 to 30 and predominantly heterosexual in orientation as defined by response to a single item ranging from 1 (*heterosexual*) to 5 (*homosexual*; similar to Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Men responding 1 or 2 were selected for participation. Of the 804 men originally screened for the study, 32 were excluded, 11 because of sexual orientation and 21 because they did not complete one or more of the screening instruments. Teams of male and female recruiters publicized the study by leaving flyers on campus and in local restaurants, stores, and bars frequented by young men as well as by making direct approaches to young men both in the downtown area and on the local beaches. Participants scheduled screening appointments by calling the phone number on the flyer or directly scheduling an appointment with the recruiter.

The mean age of the participants was 22.9 (SD = 2.3), with 74.0% (571) European American, 9.1% (71) African American, 5.1% (39) Hispanic, and the rest Asian American, Native American, multiracial, or unspecified. Most participants were currently single (564; 73.0%) or steady dating (190; 24.7%), with the rest divorced or other. The majority were current university juniors and seniors (552; 71%), although not necessarily full time; 15% (116) were college graduates, and the rest ranged from less than high school graduates to current freshmen and sophomores.

Materials

Demographic and screening information regarding drinking, drug use, substance abuse, psychological and medical problems, and selected personality characteristics were collected from all participants. The focus of the current study was the AIV (Burt, 1980). In this study, the AIV yielded a range of scores from 6 to 37 with a mean of 14.1 (SD = 5.0) and an internal consistency of .58. This estimate is similar to the original reliability estimate, but it is important to reiterate that despite this somewhat low internal consistency, Malamuth et al.

(1993, 1995) reported that the AIV was one of the strongest predictors of men most likely to be sexually aggressive during the next 10 years.

Procedure

Male and female research assistants held the assessment sessions (about 45 min) in small group rooms on campus. Each participant presented at their designated appointment time signed a consent form approved by the UNCW Institutional Review Board, completed the screening instruments, and was paid US$15.

Analysis Strategy

Analysis of the factor structure of the AIV proceeded in two steps. First, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS 14.0 for Windows to derive a preliminary factor structure. This analysis was conducted on a random sampling of 50% of the participants. Following the approach of Briere et al. (1985) and Walker et al. (1993), we used principal components analysis (PCA) to extract the factors, and a Varimax rotation was used to increase interpretability. Once we derived a factor structure, we conducted a CFA with the remaining 50% of the sample to test the fit of the derived factor structure. The CFA was conducted using AMOS 6.0. To test the fit of the derived model, the comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used. Following the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999), a CFI greater than or equal to .95 and a RMSEA less than or equal to .06 indicates a good fit. As mentioned previously, 21 (2.72%) participants were not used for the analyses because of missing data; this group did not differ in any way from the larger sample.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 shows the AIV item intercorrelations. As can be seen from this table, item correlations are 0 to small in most cases. Analyses were conducted to test the relationship between demographic variables (age, relationship status, and ethnicity) and AIV items. Age was not correlated with any of the items; however, education correlated with Item 2 ($r = -.11$, $p = .002$) and Item 4 ($r = -.13$, $p < .001$). For both items, those who reported more education endorsed less agreement with the item. Two separate MANOVA analyses were calculated to test the respective association between relationship status and ethnicity and AIV item scores. Using a Bonferroni correction of $p < .008$ (.05/6), we found no significance between group differences for relationship status or ethnicity.

PCA

The AIV data from approximately half the sample (49.5%) were subjected to a PCA with Varimax rotation. The PCA of the six items resulted in a two-factor solution. The first factor accounted for 29.4% of the variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.77. The second factor accounted for 21.6% of the variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.30. Only two factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and the scree plot was consistent with a two-factor solution. Overall, the two factors derived accounted for a total of 51.06% of the variance.

Extracted factors were rotated using a Varimax rotation to improve interpretability. Table 3 presents the item loadings on the two derived factors. Item loadings of .40 or higher were considered significant (Stevens, 2002). All items loaded on a factor, and there were no items that loaded on both factors. The first factor consisted of three items relating to perceptions of sexual behavior with women and was labeled Sexual Violence (SV). The second factor consisted of three items relating to beliefs about physical violence. Two of the items related to violence toward partners, so the factor was labeled Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

Reliability estimates using Cronbach's alpha were conducted for each scale. For the SV scale, reliability was .63, whereas the reliability for the IPV scale was .36. The scales were significantly but weakly correlated ($r = .09$, $p < .006$), thus the factors are relatively independent.

CFA

A CFA was conducted using the second half of the sample to test the fit of the derived two-factor model to the data. The results of this analysis showed that the derived two-factor model did not significantly deviate from the data, $\chi^2(8) = 9.70$, $p = .287$, and provided a good fit (CFI = .991, RMSEA = .023), whereas the null model did significantly deviate from the data, $\chi^2(15) = 195.05$, $p < .001$, and was not a good fit (CFI = .000, RMSEA = .176). These results support our first hypothesis. In comparing the original one-factor model to the derived model, it was found to deviate from the data, $\chi^2(9) = 48.18$, $p < .001$, and did not provide a good fit (CFI = .772, RMSEA = .106). The difference test comparing the one-factor and two-factor model was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 39.3$, $p < .001$, thus providing support for the second hypothesis.

Discussion

The results of this study support both of the hypotheses and suggest that the AIV is a multidimensional scale. Results of the EFA were similar to past studies, finding two major factors (Briere et al., 1985; Walker et al., 1993). The two factors accounted for a significant amount of the variance in the data. Furthermore, the results of the CFA showed that this structure is indeed a good fit to the data and is a better fit than the original one-factor model. We derived two factors that we labeled Sexual Violence (SV) and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) that accounted for a modest amount of the common variance. The two factors appear to consist of three items each, and each of the six items loads cleanly onto only one factor. The overall implication of this analysis is that the psychometric argument about the multidimensionality of the AIV is justified. One factor appears to measure attitudes toward the acceptability of physical violence in the context of intimate partnerships, whereas the other measures attitudes related to sexual violence.

The SV factor describes beliefs such as the following: "Many times a woman will pretend that she does not want to have intercourse, because she does not want to seem 'loose,' and really what she is hoping is that the man will force her" (often called belief in token resistance), and that women are sexually stimulated by violence or forced interactions. Two of the scale items were negatively correlated with education. This is consistent with the finding that sexual assault is negatively related to number of years of education and is consistent with some but not all of the studies examining the relationship between rape-myth acceptance and years of education (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). The internal consistency of this factor observed in this sample suggests that it is acceptable for use in future studies.

The IPV factor describes beliefs such as the following: "A wife should move out of the house if her husband hits her;" and "A man is never justified in hitting a woman, including his wife" (both reverse scored). In addition, with an adequately powered sample, we were able to show that the one item that seemed to load by itself in the Briere et al. (1985) analysis can actually be part of the Intimate Partner Violence factor. The one difficulty raised by this analysis is that the internal consistency of the IPV factor is no better than that of the low Cronbach's alpha derived from the original AIV scale. However, internal consistency is only one type of reliability and may not be the most pertinent given the small number of items on each scale. In this regard, test-retest reliability may be a better index.

These data also have conceptual implications. The findings of this study suggest that acceptance of sexual violence appears to be separable and relatively independent from acceptance of physical violence. A large literature exists linking acceptance of each form of violence to its respective perpetration (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Stith & Farley, 1993). However, some argue that although there is specificity in the literature, the perpetration of both types of violence is driven by a more global hostility toward women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Scales to measure this construct have been developed (Check & Malamuth, 1985; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995), and there is a wealth of generated research (Abbey & McAuslan, 2004; Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997; Parrot & Zeichner, 2003); thus, it has become an important construct in the understanding of violence against women. If, as argued, the AIV is a measure of this more general construct, then the data from the present study suggest that the construct of hostility toward women is composed of multiple relatively independent domains. Accordingly, there is a continued need from a conceptual standpoint to further explore and develop the construct of hostility toward women, which would allow for a more precise understanding of how different facets of hostility toward women predict different forms of violence against them. From a practical standpoint, using the AIV as a multidimensional scale may provide a brief and effective method for measuring two dimensions of hostility toward women.

It is important to mention some limits in the interpretation of these data beyond the typical limitations of self-report data. First, it is possible that the factor structure derived was primarily attributable to method variance, as the reverse-coded items loaded on one factor and the nonreversed items loaded on the other. In this sense, it is possible that items that load on the IPV factor do so because they share the same direction of endorsement more than being related by content. It is impossible without more items to address this possibility; however, the content of the items supports the conclusion that each factor is tapping into different forms of violence, thus supporting the two-factor solution. Specifically, the items on the SV factor clearly share sexual violence content. Two of the items on the IPV factor share content related to IPV, with one item reflecting an attitude supportive of the use of violence to resolve conflicts in general (a common attitude among perpetrators of IPV). In addition, the differential pattern of correlations between the factors does not support a method variance interpretation.

Second, the low reliability of the full scale may have influenced the results of the factor analysis in that errors in the source data can influence factor analysis results (Floyd & Widaman, 1995). However, the similarity of the derived structure in this study to the structures derived in other studies, and the apparent content validity of the items on each scale, mitigate this concern to some degree. Completely addressing this limitation cannot be accomplished in this study, but future revisions of this instrument should include new scale-relevant items to increase reliability. Low reliability may also be responsible for the factor solution accounting for only 50% of the common variance. Although accounting for this proportion of variance is not ideal, it is not uncommon (Floyd & Widaman, 1995).

The factor solution resulted in a scale that has appreciably greater reliability than the full scale with only half the items. However, the IPV scale still lacks strong reliability. This may be because of the low number of items, as well as the outdated wording of several of the items. To further increase the applicability of the AIV, future research items should be revised and, as mentioned earlier, new items should be added, keeping in mind the balance between ease of use and reliability.

This study was not designed to test the content validity or predictive validity of the derived AIV factors. Future research should include psychometric assessments of these types of validity using factor-specific measurements. Toward this end, recent data from another study

conducted by this research team showed that the SA scale is related to responses to a hypothetical ambiguous sexual coercion scenario. Males were asked to put themselves in the role of the male in the scenario (the perpetrator of the coercion) and answer the questions under the direction of what you would do in that situation. The SA scale was positively related to the degree to which the participant rated his perception of his arousal and his perception of the woman's arousal. It was also related to the degree to which he would continue to pursue sex and the degree to which he would use physical force. The IPV scale was not related to any measured variable, and the correlations between the AIV total score and these items were lower than the corresponding SA correlations. This suggests that analyzing (or even reanalyzing) data from men in sexual assault studies should be considered, with an eye to making more specific and reliable predictions about the likelihood of their sexual aggression.

In conclusion, the purpose of this article was to test the AIV's factor structure. Given that this measure is a widely used assessment of attitudes toward violence against women, but of questionable reliability and validity, it is important to clarify this measure's properties. A two-factor model was successfully derived, confirmed, and found to be superior to the original one-factor model. The finding of the two-factor structure suggests that the construct of violence toward women (a facet of hostility toward women) is more complex than currently thought. With the caveats discussed earlier, this study's results suggest that at this point the AIV could be used productively to measure attitudes related to sexual aggression. On the other hand, using the AIV as a measure of attitudes toward intimate partner violence should be done with caution, and using a single-factor score with all the items should be avoided.

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Table 1

Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence Scale Items

Item 1: A wife should move out of the house if her husband hits her
Item 2: Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force
Item 3: A man is never justified in hitting his wife
Item 4: Being roughed up is sexually stimulating to many women
Item 5: People today should not use “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” as a rule for living
Item 6: Many times a woman will pretend she doesn’t want to have intercourse because she doesn’t want to seem loose, but she is really hoping the man will force her

Table 2

AIV Item Intercorrelations

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6
Item 1		.02	.28**	.08**	.04	.15**
Item 2			.08*	.31**	.02	.32**
Item 3				.00	.16**	.07
Item 4					.02	.42**
Item 5						.03

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Exploratory Factor Analysis Item Loadings for the Rotated Two-Factor Model

	Sexual Violence (SV)	Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
Item 1	.081	.645
Item 2	.703	.078
Item 3	.000	.785
Item 4	.799	−.052
Item 5	.005	.534
Item 6	.771	.067

Note: IPV = Items 1, 3, and 5; SV = Items 2, 4, and 6.