


Exploring the efficacy of ChatGPT in understanding and identifying intimate partner violence

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to examine the efficiency and consistency of ChatGPT in identifying intimate partner violence (IPV) and the frequency of emotional and informational support ChatGPT provided.

Background: The integration of artificial intelligence–based conversational large language models, such as ChatGPT, in understanding relationship dynamics has sparked both interest and debate within the scientific community. This tool could be valuable in offering immediate, personalized responses to questions about relationships, including those involving conflicts and violence.

Method: We extracted 500 posts involving IPV and 80 posts involving nonviolent family tension from online IPV help-seeking forums as prompts for ChatGPT (Version 3.5). We coded ChatGPT's responses and examined their congruence and consistency in identifying IPV compared to human experts. We also examined incidents where ChatGPT misjudged. Lastly, we assessed the presence of informational and emotional support in ChatGPT's responses to prompts involving IPV.

Results: ChatGPT-3.5 was able to identify cases involving IPV (physical violence, psychological violence, and controlling behavior) correctly in 91.2% of the cases. Misjudgment mostly occurred due to community policies or nuanced context information. ChatGPT consistently provided emotional support and informational support to users who presented IPV-related inquiries.

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Conclusion: ChatGPT-3.5 could reach a relatively high accuracy and consistency in identifying IPV and can provide supportive responses.

Implications: ChatGPT can serve as an initial resource for individuals and family members seeking help with IPV, offering immediate, empathetic, and informational support. However, improvements are needed to address its limitations in handling nuanced cases and to ensure ethical use and user safety.

KEYWORDS

artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, help seeking, intimate partner violence, violence identification

Intimate partner violence (IPV) encompasses a range of abusive behaviors by a spouse or romantic partner, including physical violence, sexual violence, psychological abuse, stalking, and controlling behavior (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021). IPV was recognized by the UN General Assembly in 1993 as a significant threat to the health and safety of individuals, families, and communities. Globally, it is estimated that one in three women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner (Sardinha et al., 2022). Despite the profound impact on health, family and social relations, and overall quality of life, many people are reluctant to seek help from professionals due to fear of retaliation, shame, stigma, or inability to recognize the actions as violent (Boethius & Åkerström, 2020; Overstreet & Quinn, 2013).

One of the most challenging aspects of seeking help for IPV is the understanding and awareness of experiencing IPV. Understanding and leaving abusive relationships is a complex process that involves determining factors such as the recognition of the problems and the severity of the violence (Edwards et al., 2012; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). Nowadays, people increasingly turn to the internet for information and support (Saglam et al., 2024; Subramani et al., 2017). Online platforms, particularly ChatGPT—an artificial intelligence (AI)-based conversational large language model—present the potential to help individuals understand the nature of their relationships and identify abusive behaviors. Using ChatGPT is free and particularly useful for obtaining immediate, personalized responses to inquiries. However, whether it can provide accurate and reliable responses to IPV issues remains underexplored. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of ChatGPT in recognizing and classifying instances of IPV through comparison with human IPV experts. Specifically, the study focuses on assessing whether ChatGPT can accurately and reliably identify IPV cases based on prompts containing situations that involve IPV. Additionally, the study aims to explore the types of support (e.g., emotional vs. informational) that ChatGPT can offer.

IPV online help seeking

To understand the potential role of AI in addressing IPV, it is essential to examine the current landscape of support mechanisms available to people who experience IPV. During the past 2 decades, online forums have emerged as a pivotal resource, offering a combination of emotional support, legal guidance, and community solidarity (e.g., Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). These online platforms are broadly considered useful for people to gain insights about the nature of intimate relationships, such as through receiving useful information and accessing relationships with professionals (Saglam et al., 2024). These online spaces not only facilitate connections with

supportive networks but also deliver educational insights into the experiences of users (e.g., Westbrook, 2015). In addition, forum moderators and legal assistance personnel offer emotional validation and crucial informational support to those in need, often connecting users with professional help (Rempel et al., 2019; Tarzia et al., 2018). These types of support are generally classified into two categories: informational (providing advice, guidance, or factual information) and emotional support (providing expressions of empathy, emotional validation, and caring), both known to positively influence well-being (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014). Research consistently shows that these forms of support are the most common in online support groups (Deetjen & Powell, 2016; Eckstein, 2021; Love & Donovan, 2014). One significant advantage of using online IPV forums is that people who experience IPV often feel more comfortable expressing themselves in their own language when describing relationships and incidents (Saglam et al., 2024). This comfort is largely due to the anonymity provided by the online environment, making these tools particularly valuable for IPV victims.

Although online IPV forums are widely used and can offer unique value in providing information and support, they face two main limitations. The most critical is moderation delays. Because these forums typically rely on human moderators to review posts, this can introduce delays in responding to urgent queries, posing a significant limitation for users needing immediate assistance or feedback. Second, the quality of responses in forums can vary significantly, depending on the expertise and experience of the community members. Understanding and providing support for the needs of people who experience IPV requires substantial training and practice, sometimes across multiple fields, such as clinical psychology, social work, legal, and social welfare. This multidisciplinary knowledge is essential to ensure that the guidance offered is comprehensive and appropriately addresses the complex nature of IPV.

Using ChatGPT to identify IPV

With more research and platform developers' increasing interest in exploring innovative solutions, AI, particularly large language models (LLMs), are being considered as tools to provide support for understanding the nature of the relationships (e.g., Aminah et al., 2023; Singh, 2023). The emergence of ChatGPT presents an opportunity for significant advancement over traditional online forums by providing more immediate and scalable support to individuals dealing with IPV. ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI and based on advanced generative pre-trained transformer (GPT) language model technology, was launched on November 30, 2022, and has a publicly available version for free (i.e., ChatGPT-3.5). ChatGPT is a highly sophisticated chatbot capable of handling a range of text-based requests, from straightforward inquiries to complex tasks (OpenAI, n.d.-b). Specifically, this was achieved through a combination of advanced machine-learning techniques and extensive training on diverse large-text data sets. By leveraging LLMs that are fine-tuned on vast amounts of text data, ChatGPT has developed a sophisticated understanding of context, semantics, and nuances in human language (Ray, 2023). This enables it to interpret complex inputs and generate relevant and helpful responses.

Whereas most current research on ChatGPT has been in academic contexts, its potential applications in understanding the nature of relationships has started to emerge. For example, recent studies suggest that the general public is increasingly turning to ChatGPT for advice on intimate relationship issues (Carlbring et al., 2023; Lopes et al., 2024) and seeking dating advice from ChatGPT (Hou et al., 2024). Besides privacy and anonymity, ChatGPT has the advantages of providing quick and real-time answers to inquiries, and offering immediate assistance and information (Ray, 2023). Additionally, ChatGPT is adept at overcoming typos and not being disrupted by minor grammatical errors, making it easy to use for people with limited writing abilities. However, the limited research examining the quality of ChatGPT's responses raises

concerns when it is used for personal and sensitive topics such as intimate relationships with issues associated with violence and control (Sallam, 2023).

ChatGPT defines IPV as “any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship” (OpenAI, 2024). Its definition encompasses a variety of abusive actions, which can include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional and psychological abuse, economic abuse, and coercive control. Based on ChatGPT’s report, this definition is based on the understanding of the definition from various sources in its training data sets, including the World Health Organization, CDC, United Nations, as well as academic and clinical research, per replies from ChatGPT on the definition (OpenAI, 2024). Although ChatGPT is not specifically trained for IPV detection, it can recognize patterns and provide responses based on general language understanding and patterns seen in its training data. This involves a combination of natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning techniques. For example, with an input text of “He constantly checks my phone and doesn’t let me see my family,” ChatGPT generates responses based on patterns it has learned during training; it responds based on statistically learned associations between words and phrases in its training data and generates responses that are contextually aligned with themes like control and isolation, as it has been trained on a vast corpus of text where similar language patterns are associated with these themes (OpenAI, 2024). ChatGPT will also perform pattern matching by comparing the identified phrases and context against known patterns of language associated with controlling or abusive behaviors in its training data (OpenAI, n.d.-b). This involves recognizing common signs of control and isolation (e.g., threats, intimidation, and limiting social interactions), which are often red flags for IPV (M. P. Johnson, 2008; M. P. Johnson et al., 2014). Finally, ChatGPT will present the output that the text may be flagged as potential IPV for further review by professionals. Procedurally, ChatGPT has the capacity to aid IPV detection and provide support to users in this matter.

However, as an AI language model, ChatGPT generates responses based on patterns in the text and the context of the conversation (Ray, 2023; Tian et al., 2024). Its answers may vary each time because of its built-in design of randomness in generation (Ray, 2023; Tian et al., 2024). In other words, its responses are not deterministic; they are generated probabilistically. This means there is an element of randomness each time it generates a response, which can lead to different and potentially unreliable answers. In addition, the context of the conversation can influence its responses. The preceding text and the way one question is framed can lead to variations in ChatGPT’s answers. Therefore, it remains unknown what prompt question may lead to accurate IPV detection and how ChatGPT can consistently and reliably provide accurate output regarding text containing IPV. In this study, accuracy in our context refers to the extent to which ChatGPT’s identification of IPV aligns with human expert judgments. The implications of inaccuracies are significant, as they could lead to inappropriate responses or missed opportunities for intervention, potentially exacerbating the already sensitive situations that involve IPV.

Another critical area that requires investigation is the tone and appropriateness of ChatGPT’s responses to inquiries involving IPV within relationships. It is essential to understand not only the types of responses an AI system like ChatGPT can deliver but also how appropriate these responses are in supporting users both emotionally and practically. This involves assessing the appropriateness of the output ChatGPT provides for emotional support, the accuracy and helpfulness of informational support, and the overall effectiveness of the system in helping people feel understood and guided toward further actions. Online help-seeking behaviors can be categorized based on the types of support, which include emotional and informational support (Rose et al., 2000). Emotional support involves offering empathy, care, and encouragement, and importantly avoiding victim blaming, which has been found to significantly hinder an individual’s ability to reach a pivotal moment, such as deciding to leave an abusive relationship (e.g., Chu et al., 2020; Ogbe et al., 2020). In contrast, informational

support encompasses providing advice, resources, and information to help individuals navigate their situations (e.g., Renner et al., 2024). It is equally vital to guide people to resources and professionals who can offer further assistance and understanding. This support extends to connecting them with safety planning services, counseling, and legal advice. Thus, it is important to understand whether ChatGPT would provide both emotional and informational support to address the complex needs of individuals experiencing IPV.

Current study

As no studies have yet examined how accurately and consistently ChatGPT can detect and interpret IPV-related interactions like human experts, this study is designed to investigate the effectiveness, consistency, and appropriateness of ChatGPT's responses to questions regarding intimate relationship issues. We analyze ChatGPT's responses to 580 posts from IPV forums, drawing comparisons with human judgments. Our investigation is structured around three key research questions associated with ChatGPT's performance:

1. How well can ChatGPT detect IPV in comparison with human judgment? We evaluated ChatGPT's responses to 500 posts containing IPV and 80 posts containing relationship issues without IPV to assess how closely ChatGPT's evaluations align with the judgment of human experts.
2. Can ChatGPT produce reliable responses toward prompts containing IPV? We queried ChatGPT with the same posts multiple times to determine if it consistently produces the same responses, thereby testing its consistency in providing stable and repeatable advice when presented with identical inputs.
3. What types of support does ChatGPT provide in its responses to prompts containing IPV? We explored the nature of support offered by ChatGPT, focusing on both emotional support (e.g., empathy and validation) and informational support (e.g., guidance on accessing resources like safety planning, counseling, and legal assistance). These categories broadly encompass the primary ways in which ChatGPT can assist users.

By answering these three research questions, this study is designed to bridge critical gaps in the current understanding of how AI—specifically LLMs like ChatGPT—can be utilized in facilitating help seeking for users encountering IPV. The research provides an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of AI in sensitive topics, guiding future developments and implementations of AI technologies in supportive roles.

METHOD

Data collection

This study collected 500 narratives (114,112 words) manually from online IPV aid forums including the Women's Aid survivors' forum (<https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk/messageboards/>) and the WEAVE domestic violence message board (<https://www.weaveinc.org/domestic-violence-message-board>). Those selected forums serve the purpose of providing a public yet anonymous platform for users to interact with other users, and forum moderators, and seek help or legal advice. Anyone could register on the website, post, and view posts without providing private information, such as name, address, and contact information. These forums and boards contain over 5,000 posts with IPV victimization stories mainly from the United States and the United Kingdom. We manually extracted narratives that describe IPV

experiences, selecting posts that varied in length from at least 30 words to several hundred words. This range was chosen to ensure that each selected narrative provided enough detail to contribute meaningfully to the understanding of IPV experiences. Posts were extracted by the authors manually during the years 2020 to 2024. During data collection, a second round of screening for potentially identifiable information was conducted to make sure no identifiable information was included in those posts. All names mentioned in the text were redacted. We kept the location information only when it was equal to or larger than a state level. In addition, the results of the study did not include the participants' usernames. Approval for the study was granted by the university's Institutional Review Board.

IPV data coding

Our coding of the presence of IPV aligns with the CDC's conceptualization (CDC, 2021), which includes any description of physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological aggression. These IPV instances are coded as 1 (yes, IPV cases; see Table 1 for each of the IPV categories, definitions, and example texts). A second coder manually screened 20% of the posts and confirmed that they described IPV. As a result, we had 500 posts marked as containing text with IPV. To create a violence-free control group for comparison, 80 narratives from these forums that do not contain IPV but describe tensions regarding relationships were also extracted and coded as 0. A second coder manually screened 20% of posts that did not describe IPV to confirm their classification.

Extraction and data analyses

In this study, we employed frequency analyses and content analyses to address Research Questions 1 and 2. We quantified ChatGPT's outputs to assess its consistency and accuracy in identifying narratives containing IPV. For Research Question 3, we conducted qualitative coding to evaluate the content of support—specifically emotional and informational support—that ChatGPT provides. This approach allowed us to access the performance of ChatGPT in recognizing

TABLE 1 Codebook for analyzing forum posts.

Construct	Definition	Example text
Physical violence	Text describing the victim's experience of physical force, such as being hit, beaten, or kicked by the perpetrator	"In 2017 he punched across the face as I laid down next to the baby to breastfeed him."
Sexual violence	Text describing the victim's experience of the perpetrator using force to compel participation in a sex act, sexual touching, or nonphysical sexual activities (e.g., sexting) without the victim's consent or ability to consent.	"He would fake panic attacks so I would spend time with him. We had sex all the time, even when I didn't really want to."
Stalking	Text involving the description of a perpetrator's use of a pattern of harassing or threatening tactics. These tactics are unwanted and cause fear or safety concerns in a victim.	"he's on probation he stalks me he abuses me threatens me he has tried planting drugs in my car in my home last week he broke my door"
Psychological aggression	Text referencing the perpetrator's use of psychologically abusive tactics intended to demean the victim, such as name-calling and playing mind games, humiliating the victim, or making the victim feel guilty.	"Said I was disgusting, ugly, and fat. He made a disgusted face while looking at me..."

IPV-related content and also to delve deeper into the nature of the support offered by the AI system. To evaluate the accuracy and consistency of ChatGPT (Version 3.5) in classifying narratives as instances of IPV compared to human expert coders, each narrative (a total of 500 IPV cases and 80 violence-free posts) was entered into ChatGPT using a standardized prompt: "Is this considered intimate partner violence (IPV)?" This specific prompt was used consistently to maintain uniformity in the way each narrative was presented to ChatGPT, allowing us to directly assess its capability to identify IPV based solely on the information contained within the narratives. We opened a new window for each narrative to avoid memory from previous texts. We then pasted the AI-generated outputs and manually coded them to see if ChatGPT confirmed these cases as IPV (1 as identifying the case as IPV and 0 as not). To understand how consistently ChatGPT can provide answers, two independent coders entered each narrative into ChatGPT using the same standardized prompt. For the analyses, we focused on two main aspects: the agreement between ChatGPT and human experts on the classification of IPV and violence-free posts. We also conducted test runs on 70% of the narratives, testing each narrative two times to assess the consistency of ChatGPT's responses and ensure reliable output. Coders in this study were a group of research assistants with backgrounds in psychology and family sciences. These coders are not only trained in qualitative methods but also possess specialized knowledge in the content area of IPV.

The agreement analysis was conducted separately for IPV posts and violence-free posts. For the IPV posts, we compared ChatGPT's classifications with those of human experts to determine the level of agreement, and a similar procedure was conducted for violence-free posts. To further understand the errors made by ChatGPT, we identified and analyzed narratives that were incorrectly categorized. This involved examining the nature and severity of the errors to gain insights into potential patterns and themes leading to the misidentification.

To assess ChatGPT's capability in providing emotional and informational support for content containing IPV, ChatGPT's output was manually coded by types of support. The coding scheme, adapted from Shi and Chen (2014) and Chu et al. (2020), categorizes messages into emotional support provisions, informational support provisions, and instrumental support provisions. ChatGPT cannot provide physical or direct intervention support, so we removed the instrumental support category from the coding. Therefore, for this study, we coded responses only in the categories of emotional and informational support (see Table 2 for detailed coding information). Additionally, coders examined whether these responses contained judgmental tones (1 for containing judgmental responses and 0 for not containing such responses), assessing ChatGPT's ability to provide a safe space for users to express their thoughts and feelings free from judgmental interactions and victim blaming.

We used interrater reliability to measure the agreement between ChatGPT and human coders and the consistency across ChatGPT responses to the same prompts. Additionally, we performed ad hoc analyses on incorrectly categorized narratives to gain insights into the mistakes ChatGPT may make.

RESULTS

Accuracy in identifying IPV

ChatGPT-3.5 was able to correctly identify IPV cases (which contain physical violence, psychological violence, and/or controlling behaviors) in 456 out of 500 IPV instances, achieving 91.2% accuracy. For the instances where ChatGPT was not successful, three involved sporadic or historical physical violence, suggesting that the model may struggle with nuances related to the frequency and temporal context of violence. Additionally, ChatGPT encountered challenges in three cases due to content moderation policies. Specifically, when narratives included terms

TABLE 2 Codebook for analyzing ChatGPT's responses.

Type of support	Definition	Example text
Emotional support	1. Validation of feelings: The AI can acknowledge and validate the user's feelings and experiences.	"I'm sorry to hear about the distressing experiences you've been going through." "Your feelings of confusion, hurt, and the difficulty in trusting your partner again are entirely valid."
	2. Awareness and understanding: Helping users gain a better understanding of their situation, which can be empowering and enlightening.	"It's important to recognize that intimate partner violence (IPV) isn't limited to physical harm; it can also include emotional abuse, threats, intimidation, and controlling behavior, which seems to be present in your situation."
	3. Encouragement and reassurance: Offering words of encouragement and reassurance to help individuals cope with their emotions and stress.	"Remember, you're not alone, and seeking help is a sign of strength."
Informational support	1. Educational information: Providing accurate and relevant information about various topics, including IPV, mental health, and well-being.	"Yes, what you described could indeed be considered intimate partner violence (IPV). Physical violence, such as being slammed against a car, and property damage, like keying a car, are forms of abuse."
	2. Advice on coping strategies: Offering suggestions for coping mechanisms and self-care strategies.	"Self-Care: It's important to take care of your emotional and physical well-being. Engage in activities that support your well-being and consider seeking individual therapy."
	3. Resource sharing: Sharing information about support groups, counseling services, legal advice, and other resources.	"Seek Support: Connect with a local domestic violence hotline or a counselor who specializes in IPV. They can provide guidance, and emotional support, and help you understand your options."
	4. Safety planning: Guides in creating a safety plan, although this should ideally be supplemented by professional advice.	"Develop a safety plan for yourself and your children. This includes identifying a safe place to go in an emergency, having a trusted person you can contact, and keeping important documents and essentials ready."

such as "rape" or "sexual assault," ChatGPT refrained from generating responses, indicating a limitation in its capacity to analyze content related to marital rape or sexual abuse within intimate relationships.

For the 80 violence-free posts, 73 (91.3%) were correctly identified as not involving IPV. The seven misidentified cases either mentioned abusive relationships in a past relationship or contained keywords implying psychological violence such as "blame," "abusive," and "mental health issues" occurring in other relationships (such as parent-child or sibling relationships). Thus, it seems that ChatGPT occasionally miscategorized violence in other types of relationships (not intimate partners) as IPV when words implying psychological violence were present.

Consistency of ChatGPT in addressing IPV inquiries

To assess how consistently ChatGPT can identify IPV, we conducted a test involving two coders using the same prompt but on different computers. Coder 1 analyzed outputs from 500 instances, and Coder 2 examined a randomly selected subset of these—350 instances—to

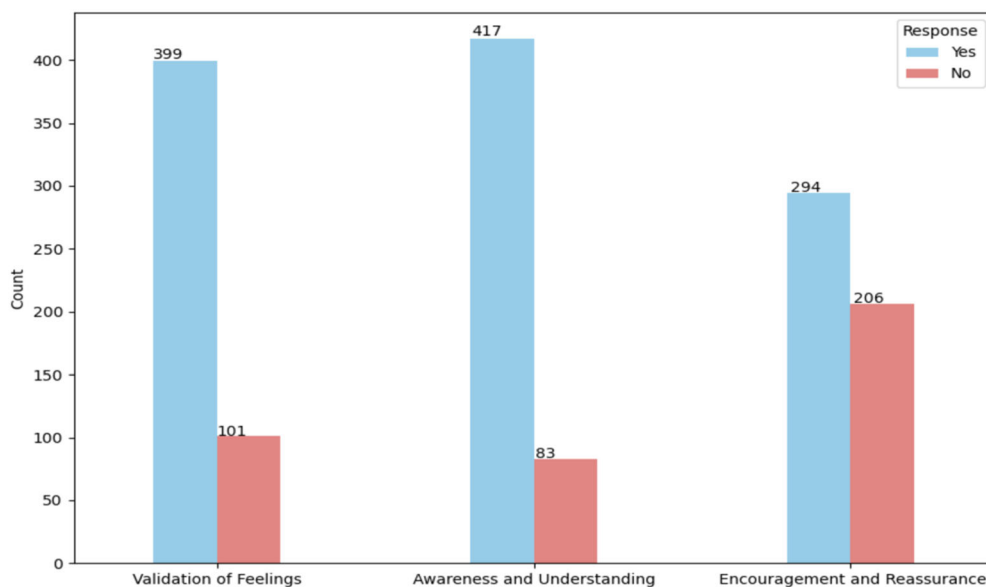


FIGURE 1 Frequency of each type of emotional support provided by ChatGPT. *Note.* Blue bars (left) represent the presence of emotional support in ChatGPT's outputs for each emotional support category. Red bars (right) represent the lack of presence of the specific type of emotional support. The total responses were 497. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

evaluate ChatGPT's responses. Both coders read the outputs from ChatGPT and coded its IPV identification. They marked ChatGPT's responses as either indicating IPV (1) or not (0). The analysis showed that ChatGPT identified IPV in the same manner in 90.5% of the cases across both tests. This demonstrates a strong level of consistency in ChatGPT's ability to recognize IPV, indicating that the model can reliably generate similar outcomes when given the same prompt.

Emotional and informational support in ChatGPT responses

Figure 1 and Figure 2 present the frequency of each type of emotional support and informational support. Specifically, for emotional support, ChatGPT often provides validation of feelings and emotional understanding. An example of such a response is "Your feelings of confusion, hurt, and difficulty in trusting your partner again are entirely valid." For informational support, the higher frequency categories are educational information and sharing resources. For instance, responses often advised contacting local authorities, domestic violence hotlines, or support organizations. This indicates ChatGPT's potential to offer empathetic responses alongside practical advice. Notably, encouragement and reassurance, safety planning, and coping strategies were only provided in 59%, 47%, and 40% of cases, suggesting the selective nature of emotional and informational support in ChatGPT's responses. In addition, all responses maintained a neutral or empathetic tone, free from judgmental responses and victim blaming.

DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of ChatGPT in recognizing and classifying instances of IPV by comparing these outputs with human experts' coding of

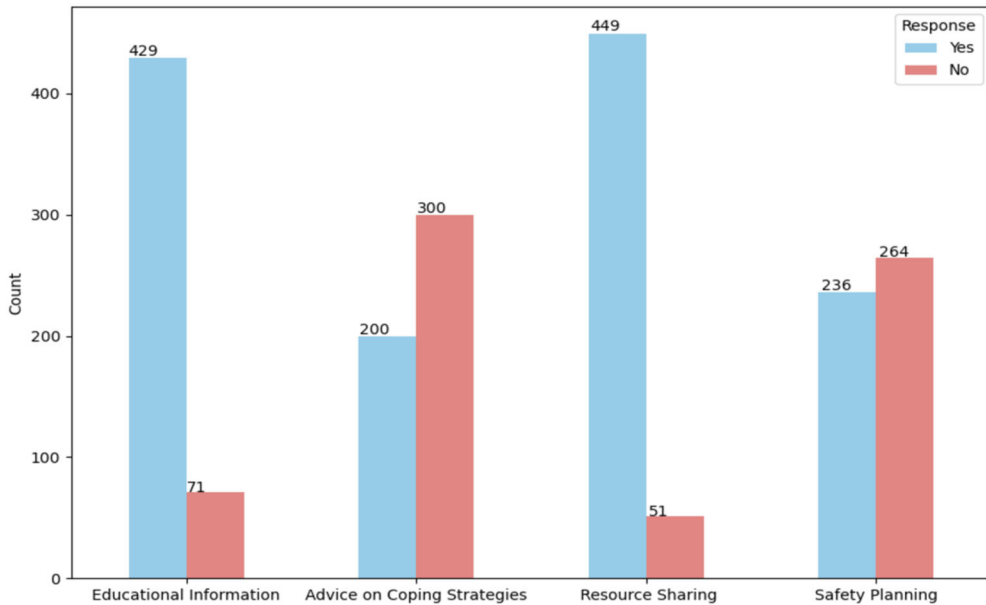


FIGURE 2 Frequency of each type of informational support provided by ChatGPT. *Note.* Blue bars (left) represent the presence of informational support in ChatGPT's outputs for each emotional support category. Red bars (right) represent the lack of presence of the specific type of informational support. The total responses were 497. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

IPV. Findings from our analysis indicated that ChatGPT-3.5 was able to correctly identify IPV cases in 456 out of 500 instances (at a rate of 91.2%) and correctly discern cases without IPV, with a rate of 91.3%. The instances in which ChatGPT failed to correctly identify IPV during one of the two evaluations typically involved descriptions of physical violence that were either infrequent or occurred in past relationships. The cases where ChatGPT identified a non-IPV situation as IPV typically involved violence in previous relationships or other types of relationships that are not between intimate partners (e.g., parent-child, siblings). This suggests a relatively high level of proficiency of ChatGPT in accurately categorizing IPV instances, though certain nuances, particularly involving the frequency and historical context of violence, may present challenges in accurate classification.

To evaluate whether ChatGPT can consistently identify IPV, we used the identical prompt on two different computers under two different accounts and asked about the same set of IPV text. The two outputs reached 90.5% agreement that those texts contained IPV. Among the instances (44 cases) where the first inquiry failed to identify IPV, 30 (68.18%) were correctly identified as IPV on the second attempt. The presence of inconsistency in interpreting relationship issues has been noted in other studies as well (Hou et al., 2024). ChatGPT's variable responses to identical prompts underscore the challenges AI encounters in relationship topics. Using ChatGPT with its default settings introduces some variability, and this randomness may not be desirable when dealing with sensitive subjects. Still, most of the cases reached an agreement, suggesting that ChatGPT can relatively reliably identify IPV cases.

The cases in which ChatGPT failed to identify IPV across both evaluations typically involved two scenarios: text violating forum guidelines and text containing requests for legal advice. In such cases, ChatGPT would respond with general advice rather than naming the nature of the relationship. This illustrates the limitations in AI recognition of IPV in scenarios where the text explicitly requests legal advice, even when the prompt specifically asks for IPV

identification. In such instances, ChatGPT tends to respond to the immediate inquiry presented in the text, avoiding the provision of direct legal advice and instead offering general information that may be pertinent to IPV survivors' legal needs. Therefore, it seems that in these cases where ChatGPT did not identify IPV reliably, it is mostly due to policy regulations instead of its incapacity to recognize IPV. Below is one example in response to legal advice related to IPV issues:

I'm not a legal expert, but I can offer some general guidance. It sounds like you have been through a challenging situation, and I'm sorry to hear about your experiences. If you are seeking legal help, here are some steps you can consider:

- **Contact a Domestic Violence Helpline or Shelter:** Reach out to a local domestic violence helpline or shelter. They can provide support, resources, and information on legal options available in your area.
- **Consult with an Attorney:** It's important to consult with an attorney who specializes in family law or domestic violence cases. They can provide advice based on your specific situation and guide you through the legal process. You may be able to find legal aid services or non-profit organizations that offer free or low-cost legal assistance.
- **File for a Protective Order/Restraining Order:** If you fear for your safety or your child's safety, you may want to consider filing a protective order or restraining order. This legal document can help keep your ex-partner away from you and your child.

Remember, each jurisdiction may have different laws and procedures, so it's crucial to consult with a legal professional who is familiar with the laws in your area. If you're unsure where to start, consider reaching out to local domestic violence organizations or legal aid services for guidance. Your safety and the safety of your child should be the top priority.

To assess ChatGPT's response stability in sensitive contexts like IPV discussions, we tested the variability of its replies to identical prompts. We observed that responses to the same forum post across multiple prompts achieved a 90.5% similarity rate. Variations in responses primarily occurred when ChatGPT shifted focus to legal or therapeutic advice instead of directly addressing whether the content described IPV. Additionally, some responses centered on the emotional distress depicted in the posts rather than directly responding to our specific prompt. This variability may be influenced by the "temperature" setting in LLMs like ChatGPT (we used default setting of 0.7 in this study), which is a parameter in the model's sampling algorithm that modulates the randomness or unpredictability of the generated responses (Davis et al., 2024). The implications of this finding may be particularly significant for IPV victims and other users who rely on ChatGPT for support or information. The variability in responses could lead to confusion and a reduction in trust. Users need to be aware that they might encounter outputs from ChatGPT that shift focus unexpectedly. To address this, future research should explore the development of some effective prompts that can better guide ChatGPT to stay "on track" and consistently address the specific questions asked. This could help ensure that the AI's responses are more predictable and aligned with user needs.

Regarding the type of support ChatGPT provides, we found that responses from ChatGPT consistently included both emotional and informational support. Specifically, for emotional support, ChatGPT often provides validation of feelings and emotional understanding. For informational support, the higher frequency categories are educational information and sharing

resources. For instance, responses often advised contacting local authorities, domestic violence hotlines, or support organizations. Emotional support including encouragement and reassurance, as well as informational support including safety planning and coping strategies were only provided in less than half of the cases. We observed that all responses maintained a neutral or empathetic tone, free from judgmental responses and victim blaming. These findings suggest ChatGPT can assist users experiencing IPV by providing both emotional support and practical informational guidance. The validation of feelings and empathetic tone can help users feel understood and less isolated in their experiences, which is crucial for emotional healing (Bove, 2019; Chin & Yi, 2022). This aligns with broader evaluations of ChatGPT in mental health care, where it has been found to offer emotional support and engagement to individuals with mental health concerns (e.g., Shen et al., 2023; Sohail et al., 2023). These past studies also found that ChatGPT can help assess the risk level of individuals experiencing mental health crises by analyzing conversations and providing emotional support and engagement. Informational support, such as recommending contact with local authorities and domestic violence resources, can empower users to take actionable steps toward their safety and well-being. This dual approach of emotional and informational support ensures that users receive both immediate comfort and practical assistance, making ChatGPT a useful tool in the context of IPV inquiries.

ChatGPT consistently provided validation of feelings, awareness, and understanding as forms of emotional support in most cases, along with educational information and resource sharing as informational support. However, encouragement and reassurance, safety planning, and coping strategies were provided less consistently, appearing in only 59%, 47%, and 40% of cases, respectively. Our observation suggests that because the prompt specifically asks ChatGPT to determine if a case involves IPV, its responses tend to focus predominantly on the identification of IPV, accompanied by educational material about IPV. In cases where additional support such as encouragement, reassurance, safety planning, or coping strategies is provided, it appears that ChatGPT is responding to nuances in the narratives that may suggest a need for further emotional or practical support. This is accomplished based on its training data and algorithmic decision-making. The selective nature of these responses indicates that ChatGPT might benefit from further tuning to consistently recognize and address these nuances across a broader range of inputs.

Although ChatGPT cannot replace professional counseling or legal advice, its consistent provision of nonjudgmental and supportive responses highlights its potential as a valuable initial resource for individuals seeking help and information regarding IPV. These findings echo other assessments of ChatGPT in the broader mental health field (e.g., Lopes et al., 2024; Oviedo-Trespalacios et al., 2023). Still, it is important to note that for safety-related issues, ChatGPT is not consistently providing information regarding safety plans in about 53% of the cases, and it is not designed to provide detailed safety plans applicable to people from different regions and areas. There is no built-in safe escape function, and the automatic recording of content makes it possible for perpetrators to track and see the interactive content. Therefore, caution is needed when using ChatGPT for safety-related information (Oviedo-Trespalacios et al., 2023).

Limitations and future directions

This study is designed to investigate ChatGPT's potential as a virtual assistant to aid users in the real-time identification of IPV. This study, although informative, has a few limitations. In our study, we extracted data from various IPV forums and message boards to ensure a variety of contexts and linguistic expressions in the IPV narratives. We collected 500 narratives that encompass a broad spectrum of situations describing IPV experiences; however, about 40% of

the posts drawn from the Women's Aid forum are predominantly from a female perspective. Although we could not collect demographic variables due to the anonymous nature of posts online, the use of pronouns and descriptions when describing perpetrators (e.g., my boyfriend, husband, ex-boyfriend) suggests that most cases involved women as IPV victims. This representation does not adequately capture the broad spectrum of IPV experiences across all genders. To include a broader population, future studies could benefit from incorporating a range of IPV-containing posts from additional sources such as social media platforms (e.g., Reddit), online health communities (e.g., WebMD), and legal and advocacy center websites.

Second, given the rapid advances in the AI field, there is an inherent challenge in generalizing the results for stable, long-term capabilities. Therefore, long-term studies are necessary to keep pace with the evolving landscape and ensure a lasting understanding of IPV identification using ChatGPT. For example, the main data analyses of this study were carried out from November 2023 to May 2024, during which a new community guideline released in January 2024 flagged content involving sexual violence, preventing ChatGPT from providing outputs on such content. If the underlying algorithms powering ChatGPT are updated or modified, the performance and accuracy in identifying IPV could change. For example, ChatGPT-4o, released in May 2024, offers enhancements such as improved understanding and context retention, enhanced language and nuance handling, and better handling of ambiguity and complexity (OpenAI, n.d.-a, 2024). These improvements are expected to allow ChatGPT-4o to respond to IPV inquiries with increased sensitivity and accuracy. The updated model should be more adept at understanding the context, recognizing the nuances of IPV, and providing responses that are not only factually correct but also contextually appropriate and supportive. However, despite these advancements, it is crucial to remember that AI responses still require human oversight and should be used in conjunction with professional judgment, particularly in sensitive areas such as IPV. Considering the rapid algorithm updates, possible shifts in training data, and regulatory changes, future research and AI tool development should incorporate ChatGPT algorithms alongside additional LLMs specifically designed for detecting IPV. This approach would help ensure the AI-generated output remains robust, adaptable, and sensitive to the nuances of IPV identification across diverse contexts.

This study aimed to explore the types of support ChatGPT can provide to prompts containing IPV situations. The standardized prompt "Is this considered intimate partner violence (IPV)?" was used in our study to establish a consistent framework for assessing ChatGPT's capability to identify IPV. Users may tend to ask follow-up questions, which, with ChatGPT's built-in memory function, could lead to a more dynamic and interactive engagement, therefore enhancing the model's ability to contextualize responses and adjust to users' informational needs. However, it also has the potential to introduce errors due to contextual fluctuation and the complexity of queries. In our study, employing a single standardized question helped control these variables to obtain a clearer, more direct assessment of ChatGPT's ability to identify IPV. Future research could investigate how the complexity and number of questions impact ChatGPT's performance, providing deeper insights into its operational effectiveness.

We acknowledge that different users, such as IPV survivors and clinical personnel, may prefer using various prompts. Looking forward, we recognize the importance of incorporating user perspectives, especially from IPV survivors, to enhance the relevance and sensitivity of our research. Future steps could involve conducting a qualitative study to gather insights from users about their preferred methods of asking questions and their comfort levels in interacting with ChatGPT. This approach will help ensure that the AI's application in IPV contexts is informed by the needs and preferences of those it is designed to support. From our observations, ChatGPT generally provides structured responses that include an analysis of the situation, a definition of IPV, emotional support, educational information, and resource sharing. However, this study did not evaluate how well this structured output is being perceived by actual users. Future

research could compare user ratings of its professionalism, practicality, and helpfulness of the information provided by ChatGPT versus human experts. This can help to have a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of AI-generated responses in real-world settings.

Regarding the identification capabilities of ChatGPT-3.5, whereas the model effectively recognized instances involving physical violence, psychological violence, and controlling behaviors, it had limitations in identifying more subtle forms of abuse such as economic violence (defined as exerting control over the other partner's access to financial resources, thereby limiting their ability to support themselves and effectively trapping them in the relationship; L. Johnson et al., 2022). This could be attributed to the nuances and specificity required to detect these types of abuse, which may not be as overtly expressed in text or may require more detailed contextual understanding than the model currently possesses. Due to regulatory constraints, from our observation, ChatGPT does not analyze content that contains explicit keywords related to sexual violence, such as "rape" or "sexual assault." This limitation affects the model's ability to process or respond to inquiries involving these terms. Lastly, our study was completed in English, and future research could try to identify the effectiveness of ChatGPT in other languages. Language is deeply tied to culture, and certain expressions or implications of violence may not translate directly across cultural boundaries. Therefore, the effectiveness of tools such as ChatGPT can vary significantly across languages other than English.

Implications

This study shows how AI can augment traditional support systems within family dynamics by providing timely and relevant information and emotional support. Our research findings suggest that querying ChatGPT with relationship descriptions followed by the prompt "Is this considered intimate partner violence (IPV)?" is effective when inquiring about the nature of intimate relationships. This question was designed and tested to leverage ChatGPT's ability to replicate the nuances of manual IPV categorization accurately. We believe this prompt harnesses ChatGPT's capacity to understand and interpret complex family dynamics involving IPV, making it a valuable tool for identifying IPV instances. For users seeking to understand their own relationships and determine whether their experiences might constitute IPV, starting with this standardized prompt can be particularly beneficial. This approach ensures that users gain insights as well as receive emotional and informational support. This enhanced understanding can help professionals in family counseling and social work tailor their interventions more effectively. For example, insights into communication patterns might inform strategies that encourage healthier communication, identify nonobvious victims or aggressors, and recognize moments when intervention could be most beneficial. Additionally, this study's approach could assist in developing educational programs that teach family members about the signs of IPV and effective communication strategies that resist and dismantle abusive dynamics.

Findings from this study have the potential to significantly contribute to the development of more sophisticated and user-centric AI solutions in the domains of healthy relationships and mental health support. By demonstrating ChatGPT's effectiveness in accurately identifying instances of IPV, our research provides valuable insights that can guide the development of refined AI tools tailored to these sensitive areas. The implications of our findings extend beyond mere identification of IPV. They suggest a pathway for creating AI systems that not only detect but also provide nuanced support tailored to individual needs. Such systems can offer empathetic, nonjudgmental responses that validate users' experiences and provide actionable advice, enhancing the overall quality of support available through AI.

For practical implications, our findings inform the creation of advanced AI-driven applications and platforms (e.g., IPV aid forum or board with built-in AI assistant as an option) that offer comprehensive support for users in abusive relationships. Such platforms could include

features for real-time risk assessment, personalized safety planning, and seamless connections to local support services and legal resources. By incorporating these advanced capabilities, AI tools can play a crucial role in early intervention and ongoing support for individuals experiencing IPV. Although our findings demonstrate ChatGPT's capacity to identify IPV from victims' narratives, it is not designed with a "Quick Exit" feature, and its default setting saves all the text it handles. We recommend that users be aware of these features and use the delete function or modify ChatGPT's settings to prevent automatic saving of conversations, as well as be familiar with ways of deleting conversations after use. These measures can help enhance the safety and privacy of users seeking help for IPV through this platform.

We encourage mental health professionals who provide help for individuals experiencing IPV to hold an open yet cautious attitude toward clients' use of AI to address IPV issues. Professionals may encourage clients to discuss their use of AI in relevant situations and discuss clients' reactions toward both emotional and informational support in ChatGPT's responses. The client's interactions with AI regarding IPV issues may signify the client's motivation and agency in navigating IPV-related situations. Mental health professionals are encouraged to discuss with the client not only the content of AI use for addressing IPV but also the emotional and clinical implications of help seeking using AI.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that ChatGPT-3.5 is relatively effective and consistent in identifying instances of IPV involving physical violence, psychological violence, and controlling behaviors between intimate partners. Furthermore, ChatGPT seemed to consistently provide support including both emotional validation and practical advice while maintaining an empathetic and nonjudgmental tone. These findings indicate that ChatGPT has significant potential as a reliable initial tool for individuals who seek support and information about relationships involving IPV.

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