

# **Literature Review and Needs Assessment on Victim Outreach Programs**

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RUNNING HEAD: EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence: Male and Female victimization and help seeking  
behaviour

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## **Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence: Male and Female victimization and help seeking behaviour**

Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse or intimate partner violence (IPV), can be broadly defined as a pattern of abusive behaviours by one or both partners in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family, friends or cohabitation Bair-Merritt, Crowne, Thompson, Trent, & Campbell, 2010). For the purposes of this review domestic violence will only involve those who are in an intimate relationship with each other, and will focus on heterosexual couples specifically. According to the 2009 Statistics Canada report on intimate partner violence there have been approximately 42,000 police calls or reports of IPV in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009). The rates of IPV can be assumed to be much higher because many males and females do not report IPV to authorities. Although men are being abused, women are the overwhelmingly majority of victims of domestic violence. Eight out of ten people that reported violence to the police were women, while only 17% were men (Statistics Canada, 2009). These statistics are consistent throughout the provinces in territories in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009). For female victims the rate of spousal violence was the highest among women aged 25 to 34, for male victims the rate was highest for those aged 35 to 44 (Statistics Canada, 2009). Current research is beginning to identify a level of gender symmetry in males and females in their experiences of violence in intimate relationship as well as the rates both men and women engage in violence towards their partner. This literature seeks to provide a comparative gender analysis of victims of IPV, and their experiences of IPV in intimate relationships. This review also seeks to explore the differences in help-seeking behaviours for men and women that can lend to explain why problems arise in victim-outreach programs.

### *Domestic violence in men and women*

Males and females have very different approaches to violence in relationships. Researchers may argue that there is no difference in tendencies to exhibit violent behaviours in males and females, but there are differences in severity of injury (Finn, & Bettis, 2006). Men are more likely to severely injure their partner by using weapons, strangulation, or any methods to enforce authority and control such as stalking, economic isolation, or consistent physical abuse (Kimmel, 2002). Women's aggression more commonly takes the form of indirect aggression such as psychological abuse such as withholding coitus, threatening the removal of children or ruining their partner's reputation (Joshi, & Sorenson, 2010). When behaving violently women commonly kick, bite, scratch and throw objects (Cho, & Wilke, 2010). One of the greatest differences in males and females regarding IPV is the motivations for committing the violence.

Maintaining power, control, and authority over one's partner is the main motivation for men (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). The loss of control or power often elicits aggression and as a result women are abused (Kimmel, 2002). Men who are abusive often feel emasculated if they are unable to control their partners, and resort to violence to ensure that their position of authority is held through fear (Kimmel, 2002). Most literature reports that control, coercion and power are consistent in almost all cases of IPV (Kimmel, 2002). According to The John Howard Society (2010) jealousy is a major motivator for men to assault their partners which is consistent with IPV literature. Women and men's position within society influences situations of IPV. Men are in positions of social and physical superiority, and women are still assuming passive roles and therefore women are very unlikely to control their partners in any way, especially with physical force (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). Control seeking behaviour in males and females is also different. Women seek control to gain autonomy in relationships where men use control to gain

and enforce authority (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). Women display violence most commonly in reaction to a behaviour of their partner such as failed attempts to gain partners attention (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) reported that experiencing powerlessness in a relationship triggers the use of IPV in women. Ultimately, women who engage in IPV explain that their violence is reactive responses such as self-defence. A vast majority of research pathologizes women's aggression in intimate relationships stating that it stems from a psychological disorder, a history of childhood abuse, or negative personality traits (Barata, 2007). This is drastically different from how society perceives men abusers. Men are seen as innately aggressive and capable of violence, where women can only express violence and aggression if it is perpetuated by disordered thinking (Tsui, Cheung, & Leung, 2010)

Gender symmetry theory posits that men and women may exhibit different violent behaviours, but argues that men and women are equally violent towards each. This theory has been a tool for many Men's Rights activists (Kimmel, 2002). Research has found evidence for gender symmetry in two specific forms of IPV; situational couple violence, and mutual violent control (Kimmel, 2002, Johnson, 2006). Situational couple violence typically occurs when arguments escalate and result in a partner acting violently towards another (Johnson, 2006). It occurs when both partners are angry, but it is only tied to specific arguments (Johnson, 2006). It is only occasional and mild and is often unlikely to result in life threatening injury in either of the partners (Johnson, 2006). In situational couple violence the use of substances, specifically alcohol was found in 95% of the reports indicating that the use of alcohol can trigger violent behaviour (Houry, Rhodes, Kemball, Click, Cerulli, & Kaslow, 2008). Mutual violent control occurs when both partners are violent and controlling towards each other (Kimmel, 2002). Intimate terrorism and violent resistance are not gender symmetric (Kimmel, 2002).

Gender disparity in violence arises in intimate partner terrorism which is almost always perpetuated by men (Johnson, 2006). Intimate terrorism is characterized by one partner using violence as a tool to control and oppress their partner (Houry et al., 2008). Control is in the form of violence, isolation, stalking, frequent physical abuse, and economic subordination.

Experiences of intimate terrorism result in severe physical injury (Johnson, 2006). Violent resistance occurs when a partner fights back against intimate terrorism, this form of IPV is conducted predominately by women (Cho, & Wilke, 2010). Kimmel (2002) found that men underestimate their violence and women may overestimate theirs. While women overestimate their own violence towards their partner they also tend to underestimate their partner's violence. Kimmel (2002) argues that given the societal norms often normalizes violence against women provides and as a result women provide excuses for their partners' violent behaviour because they somehow deserved it. Furthermore, Kimmel (2002) argues that men overestimate their partners' violence because of the threats to their masculinity.

### ***Victimization experience of men and women***

Negative effects are experienced by both men, and women. Literature appears to weigh one gender's experience of victimization over the other depending on the perspective of the research. Intimate partner violence is a gender issue and both males and females suffer physical, social, and psychological damage from the abuse. Sexism and stereotypes is one of the main problems faced by males and females. Research conducted Houry et al. (2008) found that male and female victims of domestic assault completed a survey measuring their Women's Experience with Battering scores; men and women rated similar levels of feelings of victimization. The research indicated that men and women both experience negative psychological symptoms such

as depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Houry, et al., 2008). Women and men also experience both a loss of control and power over themselves. According to Houry et al. (2008) women reported a higher loss of control than men did. The experience of women as victims is quite different than men's experience and was a major limitation of most of the studies reviewed. Due to the gender symmetry debate it has been easy to generalize males and females experience as similar, when it is not. Women are generally more severely injured by their partners and have prolonged control psychological abuse (Finn, & Bettis, 2006). Women who are in abusive relationships often blaming themselves have higher rates of negative psychological symptoms (Johnson, 2006). Further, women are still commonly economically dependant on their partners so having no economic means to survive becomes a method of future abuse, but problems with survival (Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007). Women, as well as men experience a lot of denial surrounding the abuse. As women do not want to admit that the one they love is abusive, men on the other hand have to face the ridicule of being abused by a woman which in both cases affects self-worth (Tsui et al., 2010, Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas & Engel, 2005). Women do not report or seek assistance because they believe if they do not seek help they are protecting the offender (Fugate et al, 2005). There is little literature surrounding the effects or needs of men who have been abused by their partners. Research focuses on the social barriers men face surrounding societal concepts of masculinity. Community organizations struggle with attempting to meet the needs of the victims in their area, however difficulties arise with the differences in obstacles that males and females encounter.

### ***Victim out-reach programs***

The Partner Assault Response Program facilitated by The John Howard Society is a psycho-educational program for those charged with domestic violence on a partner (personal

communication, November 24, 2010). Aside from the rehabilitation it does for the offender of the abuse, it also provides victim outreach for the victims of the abuse. There is a great deal of flexibility in how victim out-reach program runs within the P.A.R program, and it differs per region (personal communication, November 24, 2010). At The John Howard Society members call the victim four times, once a month in the sixteen week session (personal communication, November 24, 2010). Victim out-reach providers are finding that the victims are not responsive to the help being offered by victim-outreach members. Males and female victims share different experiences of help-seeking behaviours because their experience as victims is different. Differences in barriers relate heavily to gender and gender positionality. However, women are at a significant advantage accessing resources in the Peterborough area and throughout Canada (See Peterborough Resource Guide Attached). The Peterborough Resource guide provides an extensive list of shelters, and counselling support programs for women seeking assistance after domestic violence. In Peterborough there is no male-specific organization catering to male support for IPV. In 2008, men entering shelters seeking refuge from domestic abuse was 9%, however 90% did not permit the admission of men (Statistics Canada, 2009). This indicates that there are limited places for men to seek refuge from violence. Many of the community based organizations require improvements (Statistics Canada, 2009). In 2008, more than half the shelters in Canada indicated the need for additional or improved services, outreach services, public education, prevention programs, affordable housing and housing resources (Statistics Canada, 2009). Interestingly, research indicates that programs implemented for women actually benefit men. With the increase programs for women, the homicides by women have significantly declined over the years (Kimmel, 2002). With the help of the Women's Movement social services such as shelters, counselling, and a variety of other services provide the support and care

that are needed to escape dangerous situations which were not once readily available to women in the past. Although there are improvements in rates of IPV, victim-outreach providers would like to provide support to victims, but difficulties arise in administering help when individuals are refusing to speak to employees.

### ***Women's barriers to help-seeking behaviour***

The aftermath of domestic violence is different for women than men. Women are often left with little to survive on, specifically housing. Throughout the literature homelessness in women after separation is very high and there is a lot of obstacles in achieving affordable housing, especially rural areas (Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003). As well with the high prevalence of post-separation violence women's major concern is the safety of themselves and their children (Baker et al., 2003). Just because the incident of abuse is over does not mean that the violence or intimate terrorism ends. Women often seek the support of family and friends over counselling services to help them cope with the abuse (Fugate, et al., 2005). Women often need more than emotional support to get by. Women in abusive relationships are often economically reliant on their partners and leaving their partners results with zero income (Baker et al., 2003). Seeking help becomes problematic when they have no access to transportation, or they do not have the time to seek care due to childcare or employment seeking (Fugate et al., 2005). Baker et al. (2003) argue that women require more substantial support than men do because women occupy a lower status than men and often relied on males for shelter, monetary funds and childcare. Women often have to rely on welfare and food stamps after a domestic assault to begin to become independent again (Baker et al., 2003). This experience is not shared by men.

Initially, after an assault most women seek some sort of assistance, for example in a sample of 419 women only less than 2% did not seek external support (Baker et al., 2003). In

most cases the criminal justice system was the most used form of support; however many women have reported that criminal justice support is the least helpful (Baker et al., 2003). It is speculated that women find the criminal justice system less helpful because they are frustrated with the barriers that policy changes have caused them to seek help (Finn, & Bettis, 2006). With the implementation of mandatory arrest there has been much debate over whether this is benefiting women.

In the past police were used to temporarily end the violence by calming down the offender and the victim (Barata, 2007). If the violence was situational, or if the woman called for support and her partner is arrested she is now labelled a victim, and her partner labelled as an offender (Barata, 2007). Women in the past often used police for support to make the violence stop, or act as a mediator in the situation (Baker et al, 2003). In some cases the risks are too great to use the system to seek support (Baker et al, 2003). Women are arguing that they are not offered choices in charging their partners reinforcing the image of woman as the victim, or women as weak (Barata, 2007). This provides a possible explanation why victim-outreach workers are unsuccessful in helping female victims when the P.A.R program is so heavily related to their partners' charges. The current literature indicates that women are in need of monetary support, housing, childcare, and transportation to begin to access these resources.

### ***Why women do not seek help***

Victim out-reach programs are for the purposes of ensuring that the victims of a crime are aware of their rights, and available resources are made available to them. Women often find that victim out-reach programs judgemental. Fugate et al. (2005) found that women did not want to talk to people who would pressure them into leaving their partners. Preserving the relationship and protecting their partner were important factors in not seeking care (Fugate et al., 2005). It can be

speculated that women who remain with their partners after episodes of abuse would be reluctant to seek care because of guilt of having their partner charged (Baker et al., 2003). As a result they will not seek help to reinforce the idea that their partner is an abusive individual, and will put the blame on police authorities (Baker et al., 2003). There seems to be a correlation between seeking assistance and a feeling that the woman has to leave the relationship. Similar to males, some women do not think that community programs are needed or useful (Fugate et al., 2005). Women often underestimate the degree of violence and do not think that the abuse was serious enough to seek medical or psychological care. Marital status and location of the abuse were also factors for not seeking assistance. If women were not married to the offender, if they had no children, or if the abuse occurred in the man's home women were less likely to seek care (Fugate et al., 2005). Victims often reported that they handled the abuse themselves through other means while other women reported that they often wanted to seek help but transportation, childcare, and money made it difficult to access community resources (Fugate et al., 2005). If women stayed with their partners, their partners were reluctant to have the victim contacting resources for support. Some women reported shame and embarrassment but it was not a common theme as it was in male victims (Fugate et al., 2005). Both males and females not seeking help was related to privacy and confidentiality (Kimmel, 2002). There is a fear surrounding what will happen if they do seek assistance. Women appear to have a lack of trust in organizations, worrying that their children will be taken away, or that organizations will attempt to generalize their experiences (Fugate, 2005). Ultimately, the main theme that arises in the literature surrounding female victims of IPV is that they underestimate the severity and significance of the abuse on their well-being. Women often disregard the abuse as something that requires needing help. Furthermore, it appears that IPV has become normalized and is just a part of the lived experiences of women.

Although there are a great deal of community organizations in the Peterborough area to accommodate women including P.A.R women are not accessing these resources because of what appears to be a normalization of violence.

***Barriers for men seeking help: Social problem***

Hines, Brown and Dunning (2007) argue that men are victimized with a different level of severity because the system within society is designed to only aide female victims of IPV. Due to their masculine nature it is believed that men are not capable of being abused. The institutions and systems reflect these ideologies and make it difficult for men to overcome these to seek help (Tsui et al., 2010). At the same time these institutions reinforce feelings of guilt and shame about their victimization (Tsui et al., 2010). Men face problems with the criminal justice system when they admit to being victimized by their partner (Barber, 2008). Men explain that police officers and other members of community authorities are likely to believe their female partner if the male is to report the domestic violence which results in the victim being charged (Hines et al., 2007). Barber (2008) found that men seeking the support of police authorities are often ignored altogether, or if they arrive at the scene of the domestic male victims are often discriminated against. According to the P.A.R facilitators at the John Howard Society in Peterborough men are often threatened by their partners to call the police even if they are having a minor disagreement (personal communication, November 24, 2010). The female abusers are able to successfully get restraining orders under false pretences and thus label the male victim as the abuser (Hines et al., 2007). Female abusers with children are able to threaten to remove the children from the male victim or even threat to hurt the children so that their partners will comply with their abuse (Hines et al., 2007). This binary has put male victims at a significant disadvantage when seeking help and support for their victimization. Male victimization is not

recognized or accepted as a serious form of victimization. Women can play the victim while men suffer the consequences. Due to this males face significant obstacles when seeking services to help them.

Reluctance to report domestic violence by men is due to the social prejudices and taboo nature (Barber, 2008). The stereotypes of men as stronger than women and therefore are perceived as weak or they are offenders trying to move quickly through the justice system by seeking help (Barber, 2008). Males who seek care are often met with disbelief and employees are ill-equipped to deal with male victims (Tsui et al., 2010). Due to the social attitudes, and stereotype and lack of male specific community based organizations male victims are often not encouraged to report violence or seek help (Hines et al., 2007). Many of the organizations men seek are actually for women victims and often deny men care. Shelters and safe homes are used to protect women from violent male partners; however this is not available to men (Statistics Canada, 2010). The struggles in dealing with the denial, disbelief, stereotypes of innate male behaviours are just some of the contributing factors that men do not seek care for victimization.

### ***Why men do not seek help***

There may be services provided for men however through social discourses of masculinity, and victimization institutions appear to discourage men from seeking help. Denial is the most common reason why men will not seek help from organizations. They are often in denial about the effects of abuse on psychological and physical well being (Tsui, et al. 2010). Admitting the effects, they feel like they are feminine or weak, they do not think others can help they do not think services want to help them or understand (Tsui et al., 2010). Seeking help would admit that there is a problem, or that they are feeling vulnerable which are not masculine traits or behaviours. This denial makes it difficult to seek psychological or community care

because this denial is reinforced by the stigma surrounding male victims. Men face significant restrictions on their gender flexibility as well as being able to express vulnerability. Even if services are provided for men, men are often not open about the abuse or will seek support for community services due to the stigma (Tsui, et al., 2010). Men experience a great deal of shame associated with being a victim, they are unwilling to be viewed as weak, and do not want anyone to know the abuser is female, and they do not define their partners action as abuse (Hines et al., 2007). Stigma is one of the greatest obstacles, even though men may seek counsel they feel as though support workers do not actually view them as victims, or become overly sympathetic (Tsui et al., 2010). Tsui et al. (2010) found that men have reported to prefer hiding their problems than be stigmatized. Reasons for hiding their abuse is because they report that organizations believe that they are the true perpetrators of violence (Tsui et al, 2010).. Males report that they do not feel that there are services being provided that will cause a benefit for them because the target clients are usually women. This makes the male feel that these services are not suitable for them (Barber, 2008). This lack of appropriate services make men feel isolated, and often reinforce the idea that as a male they can not be a victim (Barber, 2008). In Peterborough, it is evident on the lack of services provided for men in regards to domestic violence. Males also report that employees of the organizations are often not males and feel as though they are being judged by the women (Tsui et al., 2010). Similar to females men take a lot of self-blame regarding their experiences of abuse, however there is such little research on male victims that it is difficult to make any significant inferences. Men are in a difficult situation, they are not allowed to be perceived as the victim, but if they are to defend themselves against women they become the abuser and face more significant consequences than women.

### Recommendations

Based on the literature there are several implications and recommendations that can be made to provide better assistance to male or female victims of IPV. Firstly, with the increasing reports of male victims of IPV male-specific programs need to be designed. Not only because it is easier for the males to talk to another male, but based on the research the experiences of male victims is different than females and therefore there cannot be one universal program for both sexes. There also appears to be a communication break-down between the victims and the organization. Women and men do not appear to know what kind of help, or how the organization will be useful to them. If only lists of community organizations are given to victims without any explanation of the services or benefits being provided individuals are going to be less likely to seek out the program independently. Most of all, educational programs should be designed and implemented at a younger age to begin to breakdown the apparent gender role stereotypes in order to change how we perceive masculine and feminine. Obviously, these recommendations are met with issues of funding, and the need for policy change however it appears that more needs to be done to breakdown the power imbalance between organizations and victims. The main problem with help-seeking behaviour is gender responsibility, gender restriction, which are having significant impacts on the lives of victims. With these forms of programs perhaps men will not overestimate their victimization and women will not underestimate the significance and violence being imposed on them.

### *Conclusion*

This review of literature provides a comparative gender analysis on experiences of men and women experiencing abuse, barriers to seeking assistance, and why these barriers are preventing individuals from accessing care. The literature has implications for improvement in all areas of victim outreach specifically for men. The research is extremely limited on what services men need in order to feel supported after domestic violence incidents. It is evident that IPV in relationships is a gender issue, however very little research is being conducted surrounding the differences in experiences and how it relates to gender. It is common for researchers to generalize victim's experiences while ignoring the individual and lived experiences of men and women. As the issue of IPV is entrenched with gender stereotypes and social discourses it is often difficult to manoeuvre through these obstacles. However, one thing is certain; both males and females experience IPV and according to reports at very similar levels for mild forms of abuse. If this is the case than males cannot be discounted as having proper community resources provided to them. Although women have a great deal of resources at their disposal many are not utilizing them, due to fear of judgement, lack of transportation, money and childcare. Furthermore, there appears to be similarities in men and women are reluctant to seek out these programs because they are not being educated on what the services provide. Further research needs to be conducted on the effects of violence on male victims. Due to the lack of resource for men research should focus on these needs in order to ensure that a proper program is developed effectively. Further research should also focus on how organizations promote their services to males and females, and how these organizations may be reinforcing gender binaries. Ultimately research in this area is lacking and research should be conducted in all areas to provide a better understanding of men and women's lived experience.

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