

The Multi-Faces of IPV Across the Prairie Provinces: Men as Victims

Summary

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Purpose

This study was the result of a special call-out by Prairie Action Foundation for tri-provincial research to examine men as victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) across the prairies. The project was initiated by The Laurel Centre in Winnipeg and involved academics from RESOLVE Centres in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Family Service Regina and Family Service Saskatoon were the community partners in Saskatchewan and Calgary Counselling Centre was the community partner in Alberta.

The purpose of this study was to explore men's experience of IPV across the Prairie Provinces and answer the following questions:

1. What are men's experiences as victims of IPV?

- a) What is the nature of the violence/abuse experienced by men in their intimate partner relationships and the context of the violent/abusive episodes?
- b) How do men describe the impact of being a victim of IPV?

2. What are men's experiences of help seeking?

- a) When do men seek help?
- b) Which sources of help do men seek?
- c) What are men's perceptions of the process of help seeking?

3. What are the barriers, challenges and/or gaps that men experience in terms of seeking help?

4. What are recommendations for addressing men's experiences of IPV?

In order to answer these questions, interviews were conducted with men from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta who had experienced violence by an intimate partner. A total of 45 men were interviewed. This included 34 in-person interviews with men in urban centres (Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Calgary) and 11 telephone interviews with men in rural and northern communities.

Individual and focus group interviews were also conducted with service providers from agencies/ organizations that provide service to men who experience IPV. Across the three provinces a total of 41 service providers participated in interviews. These included in-person interviews with service providers in urban centres and telephone interviews with service providers in rural and northern communities in each province. There was a high level of consistency between what was stated by men and service providers.



Findings



Men Interviewed by Province

Province	City/ Rural	Number of Participants
Alberta	Calgary/Edmonton	13
	Rural/Northern	3
	Total	16
Saskatchewan	Regina/Saskatoon	9
	Rural/ Northern	2
	Total	11
Manitoba	Winnipeg	10
	Rural/ Northern	8
	Total	18

Total Number of Men Interviewed: N=45

Findings

Description of Participants:

- 44 years was the average age of men who participated in interviews
- 91% of the men self-identified as being heterosexual
- 60% of the men reported European/White descent; 27% were Indigenous and 13% were from other visible minorities
- 56% of the men had completed post secondary education and 58% were employed
- 89% of the men were no longer in an abusive relationship with their partner
- 36% men had a previous relationship in which they experienced IPV
- Men had been in a relationship with their most recent abusive partner from 1 to 40 years with an average of 9.5 years
- 69% of the men had children (average of 3 children)
- 29% of the men had children living with them either full-time or in shared custody arrangements

Service Providers (Total 41):

- 73% of the service providers were female
- 71% of the service providers were from urban areas
- Service providers worked in a variety of sectors that included:
 - Police/RCMP
 - Probation
 - Victim Services/Domestic Violence Case Court Workers
 - Family Centres/Support Programs
 - Shelters
 - LGBTQ2S+ Support Services
 - Counselling Services
 - Sexual Assault Services
 - Municipal Government
 - Housing



Respect

Men's Experience as Victims/Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

Nature of Abuse

Men were asked about the type of abuse they had experienced in their relationships. The results are shown in the table below. Most men reported more than one type of abuse and most reported that the incidents began early in the relationship.

	Number of Men	Percent
Physical	38	84
Emotional	45	100
Sexual	7	16
Spiritual	10	22
Financial	30	67
Other Types of Control/Abuse	21	47

“Other” types of control/abuse included threats of violence by partners as a means of controlling men's behaviour, threats that partners would take children and/or not allow men to see their children and actually denying men access to their children. In addition, men described what service providers called “legal” or “systems” abuse which involved men's partners manipulating or lying to the police, court personnel, or child welfare agencies. This might involve telling authorities that men were physically violent or partner's lying in the context of men's attempts to gain custody or access to their children.

When describing the context of the incidents, 44% of the men indicated that alcohol or drug use were involved; this sometimes involved both the men and their partner, but more often only the partner was using alcohol or drugs. A number of men stated that their partners had previously experienced trauma and/or had mental health issues and attributed the abuse to these factors. The majority of the men (77%) had never used violence in the relationship.





“By the time our marriage had reached the end I had no friends, I had no family, I had no activities, I had no hobbies....

By the time the marriage was ending, she had eroded me to basically this man in a cage.”

~Male Participant

Impact of Abuse

Men and service providers described various aspects of men's lives that were negatively impacted by the experience of abuse. Examples include:

Impact on Physical and Mental Health:

- Lost/gained weight
- Headaches
- Sleep problems
- Worsening of existing health conditions
- Loss of identity/self-esteem
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicide thoughts/attempts
- Post traumatic stress disorder
- Alcohol/drug use

Impact on Employment/School:

Men described how injuries or the emotional impact of abuse prevented them from being able to focus or do their jobs or studies. A few men had been fired because of poor performance or missing work.

Impact on Relationships:

Men described being afraid to enter new relationship or being hypervigilante for signs of abuse in a new relationship.

Impact on Parenting:

Men's parenting was impacted in various ways. For example, some men were not allowed to participate in decision making around childrearing while they were still in the relationship with their abusive partner. If the relationship ended, not being able to see kids was devastating for fathers. A few service providers talked about how men's parenting improved once they were out of the abusive relationship.

Men's Help Seeking Experiences

A few of the men who were interviewed had never told anyone about the abuse they had experienced. Those men who had sought help and support would most often initially turn to informal sources of support such as family members and friends. These family and friends often encouraged men to seek help from formal services such as the police or counselling services.

When those men who did reach out were asked about the response they received while seeking help, men's replies were mixed. While some men reported a very positive response from informal and formal sources of help, others reported a negative response that they did not perceive to be helpful.



“Nobody teaches men that you don’t have to put up with this. A lot of the times the conversation is, ‘Be a Man’, just put up with it.”

~ Male Participant

Men's Help Seeking Experiences Cont..

Barriers to Seeking Help

During the interviews, men and service providers were asked about anything that might make it difficult for men to seek help. Several barriers were identified:

Social Construction of Masculinity:

Traditional cultural norms/ideals and stereotypes regarding masculinity were repeatedly discussed as a barrier to seeking help. Some men referred to this as “toxic masculinity” and men and service providers described the expectations for men to be tough, strong, dominant, and self-reliant. This is also a central part of the context of male victimization and contributes to the belief that men cannot be victims of IPV.

Disbelief/Denial of Victimization:

Men reported not recognizing their experience as abuse and not seeing themselves as victims. In addition, men felt that seeking help may be construed as a sign of weakness.

Shame/Stigma:

A sense of shame about their experience and a fear of being stigmatized prevented men from disclosing the abuse they experienced and seeking help. This was even greater for individuals in the LGBTQ2S+ community who are often also stigmatized because of sexual orientation.

Fear of Not Being Believed/Fear of Being Blamed:

Men's fear of not being believed if they disclosed abuse or of being blamed for incidents was often based on their previous experience and their initial contact with systems and agencies.

Financial Barriers:

Financial barriers to leaving or seeking help included costs for housing or legal fees.

Can't Find Help:

Men described either not knowing where to look for help or looking for help and not being able to find services.

Love/Commitment:

Men described loving and being committed to their partners and families and wanting the relationship to work. .

Fear for Children/Losing Contact with Children:

Men reported feeling the need to remain in the relationship in order to protect their children or being afraid that if they disclosed the abuse, they would not be able to see their children.

Gaps and Challenges in Service

Both the men and service providers who participated in interviews were asked if the existing services meet the needs of men who experience IPV. In short, the answer to this question was a resounding “No”. A number of gaps/challenges in services for men were identified:

Gaps and Challenges in Service Cont..

- Lack of services for men and especially shelter and housing services; this is particularly true in rural/remote areas
- Most services for men are offender based
- Men do not see themselves represented in existing services
- Lengthy wait times for service
- Bias within systems and among service providers that involves the belief that men are not victims of IPV
- Lack of training of service providers to assist male victims
- Lack of clear policies and guidelines within systems/agencies in terms of providing service to men
- Gender politics/backlash that involves resistance among service providers to acknowledge male victimization and the need to provide service to men

Recommendations for Improving our Response to Men who Experience IPV

During the interviews and focus groups, men and service providers were asked for suggestions and recommendations for ways improve the provision of service to men who are victims/survivors of IPV. A number of suggestions were made:

Address Gender Politics

There is a need to broaden our conversations about IPV and to check our own biases with regard to who may be victimized.

Provide Better Training for Service Providers

Service providers need more training about male victimization and systems/agencies need clear policies and guidelines.

Increased Public Education

- Domestic violence education campaigns need to be inclusive to increase awareness that IPV includes both male and female victimization.
- Men need to be represented (other than as being offenders) in educational material such as brochures, posters and social media, and in advertisements about domestic violence services.
- Education targeting children and youth is essential so that they receive more information about healthy relationships and a stronger message that violence is never acceptable.
- Education also needs to focus on types of masculinity and healthy masculinity.

Provide More Advocacy for Men and Advocacy for Services for Men

Expand and Develop Existing Services and Resources

- More male specific services are needed.
- Holistic models of service are needed with greater collaboration between systems and service providers.
- Services should be culturally safe and appropriate.