

Child Protection

Child Protection, Intimate Partner Violence and Traumatic Brain Injury in Canada



Definitions

Child Protection Involvement

The involvement of child protection services in response to concerns about a child's safety and well-being, including assessments, interventions, and support services to safeguard children and promote healthy development.

Interagency Fragmentation

A lack of coordination among service systems, such as intimate partner violence service organizations, child protection, and legal sectors, that creates disconnected responses, conflicting mandates, and gaps in service delivery, which can retraumatize survivors.

Co-located Service Teams

Multidisciplinary teams (e.g., child protection, IPV organizations, and mental health services) working together to improve coordination and provide integrated, survivor-centered care.

Overview

The intersection of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and Child Protection presents critical yet often overlooked challenges. Children's exposure to IPV is a leading cause of child welfare involvement. However, the neurobiological impacts of brain injury that happens after head trauma or strangulation on caregivers are often overlooked, misdiagnosed, and insufficiently addressed across systems.

Themes and Issues

- **IPV Exposure as a Driver of Child Welfare Involvement:** Exposure to IPV is a major driver of child protection cases and is linked to emotional and behavioural issues in children, especially when maternal mental health needs are unmet (Black et al., 2024; Ravi, 2021).
- **Symptoms Misread as Parenting/Maternal Deficits:** TBI symptoms (memory problems, emotional dysregulation, fatigue, disorganization, difficulty following through, irritability) can resemble behaviours interpreted by as CPS systems as "poor parenting", neglect, non-compliance, instability, or lack of capacity.
- **Pathologising Survivors:** Because IPV-related brain injury is often unidentified, mothers may be blamed rather than support
- **Need for Trauma-Informed and Brain Injury-Aware Integrated Practice:** Strong evidence supports coordinated, trauma-informed, and brain injury-aware approaches to ensure survivors and their children receive support rather than blame or punitive responses, including:
 - Co-located service teams to support real-time collaboration between IPV, child welfare, and mental health professionals (Hale et al., 2024).
 - Cross-sector training and shared language to improve awareness and understanding of IPV-TBI impacts (Laing et al., 2018).
 - Routine screening of survivors/caregivers for IPV and neurocognitive issues (Sayrs et al., 2022).
- **Service Fragmentation and Structural Silos:** Limited coordination across child protection, IPV sector, and legal systems leads to fragmented care. This can result in inconsistent responses, inadequate safety planning, and further harm to survivors and children.

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This document was developed with the assistance of AI (OpenAI's ChatGPT) for drafting and phrasing, based on our literature review findings