



Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV): Information Sheet

What is intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV)?

Intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) is any form of sexual assault that takes place within an intimate relationship. It includes not only marital rape, but all other forms of sexual assault that take place within a current or former intimate relationship, whether the partners are married or not. IPSV involves using force, threats or coercion to obtain sex or sexual acts; shaming a woman's sexuality or sexual preferences; and/or not respecting a woman's sexual or physical privacy. In a relationship in which IPSV is present, sexual violence is used to gain power and control over a partner.¹

What is intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV)?

IPSV includes but is not limited to the following:²

- coerced or forced oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse
- violent sex (physical abuse before, during, or after sex)
- forced participation in group sex, or sex with another person, or sex with partner watching or in front of children
- unwanted sexual touching or being forced to touch
- making degrading sexual taunts
- forced involvement in making or watching pornography
- forced prostitution
- use of technology to victimize
- using sex to prove faithfulness
- withholding affection if sexual demands are not met

While most IPSV takes place in relationships where additional forms of violence are present, IPSV does occur in relationships not characterized by other violence.³



How common is intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV)? What are some of the common characteristics of IPSV? Who is at risk for IPSV?

Like other forms of sexual violence, it is difficult to know the extent of IPSV. As with all forms of sexual violence, women are often reluctant to disclose experiences of sexual violence. Additionally, in cases of IPSV, women may not recognize their experience as one of sexual assault and thus may not identify as victims. Thus, when considering statistical measures of IPSV it is important to remember that because of these complexities the cited prevalence rates are likely underestimates.

- In 2011 in Canada, 17% sexual assaults against women were perpetrated by intimate partners.⁴
- **IPSV often occurs repeatedly within a relationship:** One study found that 33% of abused women had been sexually assaulted by their partners 2 to 20 times; 31% had been sexually assaulted more than 20 times in their relationship.⁵
- **IPSV can be a serious risk factor for domestic homicide:** A physically-abused woman who is also experiencing sexual violence was more than seven times more likely than other abused women to be killed.⁶
- **Aboriginal women** throughout Canada report rates of physical and sexual violence and psychological abuse by intimate partners that are three times higher than those reported by non-Aboriginal women.⁷
- The presence of **physical abuse, pregnancy, illness, and attempting to leave** or being **separated or divorced** from a partner are all associated with higher levels of IPSV.⁸
- **IPSV can be present in same-sex relationships.** One study found that 70% of lesbians indicated experiencing incidents of IPSV⁹. Partners may threaten to 'out' their partners if sexual demands are not met. Lesbian women experiencing IPSV face additional barriers in seeking support because of the erroneous belief that SV cannot exist in same-sex relationships.¹⁰

What are some of the impacts unique to IPSV? What are some of the factors that differentiate IPSV from other sexual assault survivors? What are some of the factors that differentiate IPSV from domestic violence?

IPSV carries with it the same impacts as domestic violence and sexual violence. However, because it rests at the intersection of both of these forms of violence, it also involves a number of unique impacts.¹¹

Difficulty defining the act(s) as sexual assault:

Women are socialized to see rape as involving non-consensual sex between two strangers. Additionally, women may be reluctant to define a partner she loves as a 'rapist.' For these and other reasons, a woman experiencing IPSV may have trouble naming her experience as one of sexual assault. This difficulty in identifying an experience as sexual assault can increase the severity of many of the additional impacts.

Longer-lasting trauma: Despite the common assumption that IPSV does not hold as severe an impact as sexual assault by a stranger, research indicates that the trauma resulting from IPSV can in fact be longer lasting and more severe. In part, this is because IPSV survivors face unique challenges around recognizing and naming an act as sexual assault, as well as increased barriers and reluctance to tell others and seek support.

Higher levels of physical injury: While not all sexual assaults include additional physical violence beyond sexual violence, those that do involve injury are likely to be intimate partner sexual assaults. Because IPSV victims experience repeated abuse, the likelihood of physical injury and trauma increases. IPSV is associated with enduring and serious gynecological conditions, chronic pain, severe headaches, increased rates of cervical cancer associated with HPV, as well as concurrent injuries associated with maladaptive coping strategies, such as drug and alcohol use and smoking.¹²



Higher incidence of multiple sexual assaults:

IPSV often occurs repeatedly in a relationship, and IPSV survivors suffer the highest frequency of multiple sexual assaults. This experience of repeated assaults differentiates IPSV from sexual assault perpetrated by a stranger and carries unique consequences for healing and impacts.

Higher levels of anal and oral rape: Incidents of IPSV appear to be characterized by higher levels of anal and oral rape. These forms of assault are seen as strategies partner perpetrators use to humiliate, punish, and take ‘full’ ownership of their partners.

Advice to ‘put up with’ sexual assault and other forms of secondary wounding:

The commonly held misconception that sexual assault within an intimate relationship is not sexual assault holds a number of repercussions for IPSV survivors who may reach out for help. Marital rape survivors are prone to be advised by church, family, or friends that it is their “wifely duty” to submit to sex with a partner. Similarly, IPSV survivors may face criticism, judgement, or not be taken seriously by police, the legal system or other service providers who continue to perpetuate erroneous beliefs around IPSV and SV in general.

Financial dependency: Perpetrators of IPSV may use a woman’s financial dependency to engage in coercive sexual assault. Furthermore, by using various strategies to further compromise a woman’s independence (i.e. not permitting her any money or employment), a perpetrator may further entrench his ability to engage in sexually violent behaviours.

A general climate of sexual assault: Women living with IPSV may face a host of other behaviors than rape that would not be acceptable if committed by strangers, such as their breasts being hurt, being forced to touch the perpetrator sexually, and degrading name calling.

Potential Fatality: Women who experience sexual assault in addition to physical violence are at a higher risk for homicide than women who are physically abused but not raped.¹³ Furthermore, because women are at an increased risk when

leaving a relationship, it is important that safety issues are considered in light of the presence of IPSV.



Deliberately Inflicted Pregnancy or STIs: Women experiencing IPSV may face the additional impact of unwanted or deliberately inflicted pregnancy in which men rape to impregnate their partners in order to force them to remain in or return to the relationship. Similarly, women experiencing IPSV are at a higher risk of contracting an STI, including HIV/AIDS, from unprotected sexual activity, either from a partner who is unaware of his or her STI or HIV status or from deliberate non-consensual unprotected sex acts by people who are using this very real threat to control and harm their partners.¹⁴ One study found that 20% of IPSV victims experienced rape-related pregnancy, and 15% of women attributed at least one STI to IPSV.



Psychological Effects, including shame and confusion:

Women experiencing IPSV often carry a variety of psychological effects including depression, suicide, PTSD, anxiety, fear, self-blame, low self-esteem, and guilt.¹⁵ Additionally, women survivors of IPSV may experience intense self-blame, shame, and confusion:

Self-blame & Shame: Women may experience intense self-blame and shame for a variety of reasons unique to IPSV.

Confusion: Women may struggle with confusion in a number of ways unique to IPSV. If women are not able to name or label their experience as sexual assault they are less likely to view the impacts they are experiencing as related to the sexual violence: “because they were sexually assaulted or abused by an intimate partner, they frequently don’t identify as victims of rape or sexual assault, yet they are experiencing emotions as a survivor of sexual assault.” Survivors of IPSV may experience confusion that is rooted in their inability to trust their own judgement, the sense of betrayal they feel at their partner, or societal beliefs that repeatedly deny her experience as one of sexual violence.¹⁶

References

¹ Definition compiled from [WCSAP] Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs. (n.d.) *Fact sheet on intimate partner violence*. Olympia, WA: WCSAP.

² List is compiled from Levy-Peck, J.Y. (N.D.) *Intimate Partner Sexual Violence A Train the Trainer Curriculum*. Retrieved from <http://www.wcsap.org/pdf/Train%20the%20Trainers%20Curriculum%20FINAL%208-09.pdf>.

³ McOrmond-Plummer, L. (2009). Considering the differences: Intimate

partner sexual violence in sexual assault and domestic violence discourse. In *Intimate partner sexual violence: Sexual assault in the context of sexual violence*. 2nd ed. Olympia, WA: WCSAP. 1-4.

⁴ Sihna, M. (2013). *Measuring violence against women: Statistical Trends 2011*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

⁵ Russell, D. (1990). *Rape in marriage*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

⁶ Campbell, J.C. et al. (2003). Assessing risk factors for intimate partner homicides. *National Institute of Justice Journal* (250): 15-19.

⁷ CRIAW. (September, 2013). Fact sheet: *Violence against women in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: CRIAW-ICREF. 9.

⁸ [WCSAP] Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs. *Intimate partner sexual violence: A train-the-trainer curriculum*. Olympia, WA: WCSAP.

⁹ Kelly, T. & Stermac, L. Intimate partner sexual assault against women: Examining the impact and recommendations for clinical practice. *Partner Abuse* (3).1: 107-122.

¹⁰ Cherniak, D. et al. (2005). Intimate partner violence consensus statement. *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada* 27(4): 365-418.

¹¹ The following list of impacts is adapted from McOrmond-Plummer, L. (2009). Considering the differences: Intimate partner sexual violence in sexual assault and domestic violence discourse. In *Intimate partner sexual violence: Sexual assault in the context of sexual violence*. 2nd ed. Olympia, WA: WCSAP. 1-4, unless otherwise noted.

¹² Kelly, T. & Stermac, L. Intimate partner sexual assault against women: Examining the impact and recommendations for clinical practice. *Partner Abuse* (3).1: 107-122.

¹³ Campbell, J.C. et al. (2003). Assessing risk factors for intimate partner homicides. *National Institute of Justice Journal* (250): 15-19.

¹⁴ [WCSAP] Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs. *Intimate partner sexual violence: A train-the-trainer curriculum*. Olympia, WA: WCSAP.

¹⁵ Kelly, T. & Stermac, L. Intimate partner sexual assault against women: Examining the impact and recommendations for clinical practice. *Partner Abuse* (3).1: 107-122.

¹⁶ Winters, M. (2009). Making the connections: Advocating for survivors of intimate partner sexual violence. In *Intimate partner sexual violence: Sexual assault in the context of sexual violence*. 2nd ed. Olympia, WA: WCSAP. 7-11.