

Evidence Brief: Intimate partner violence

in Canada among civilians, military,
and Veteran populations

What is intimate partner violence?

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to any behaviour that occurs within current or former intimate relationships and causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm. This includes physical aggression, sexual coercion, and psychological or emotional abuse.
- Psychological or emotional abuse includes coercive and controlling behaviors such as isolating an individual from family and friends, monitoring movements, and restricting access to finances.
- Individuals who use IPV are known as perpetrators and individuals who experience IPV are known as victims. Some individuals may both experience and use IPV.

Why is it a problem?

- In civilian contexts, the use and experience of IPV is commonly associated with physical and mental health conditions, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance use disorders.^{1,2}
- IPV is commonly reported among military and Veteran populations. A recent meta-analysis of population-based studies primarily from the United States found that one in eight military personnel and Veterans reported recent use of violence in intimate relationships. One in five military personnel and Veterans indicated being recent victims of violence in intimate relationships.³
- Military and Veteran populations are at greater risk of using or experiencing IPV due to unique and stressful characteristics within military culture, such as deployment and combat exposure.^{4,5}
- IPV can have broad effects on military personnel and Veterans, including direct impacts (e.g., physical injury or mental health problems) and indirect impacts (e.g., reduced workplace productivity).

IPV in Canada

- Over 100,000 Canadians between the ages of 15-89 years experienced IPV in 2019, which accounted for 30% of all police-reported violent crimes⁶, and was a 6% increase from 2018⁷. IPV was the most common type of police-reported violence experienced by women, with women accounting for 80% of all IPV victim reports.⁷
- In 2009 the financial cost of IPV in Canada was estimated to be \$7.4 billion.⁸
- Although similar proportions of civilian Canadian men and women experience physical or sexual IPV (3% and 2%, respectively), and emotional or financial IPV (10% and 9%, respectively) in their current relationship⁹, IPV has a greater impact on women:¹⁰
 - Canadian women who experience IPV are twice as likely to report physical injuries compared to Canadian men who experience IPV, and are more likely to report short-term emotional impacts of IPV, such as feeling fearful, afraid, upset or confused. Although the long-term effects of IPV are experienced by both men and women, women are more likely to experience nightmares, feel numb or detached, and exhibit avoidant behaviours.⁹

- There is a lack of Canadian data pertaining to the experience and use of IPV in gender diverse populations. IPV incidents among same-sex partners have accounted for 3% of all police-reported incidents of IPV in Canada between 2009-2017^{11,12}. Within a Canadian context, one study found that physical assault was the most commonly police-reported crime in same-sex relationships, with similar rates reported in heterosexual relationships (58-62% and 63%, respectively).¹²
- The rate of IPV perpetration in the Canadian civilian context has not been rigorously investigated. Figures from population-based studies in the United States suggest around 6% of the civilian population report any past-year IPV use.¹³

IPV in Canadian military population

- Very little is known about the use or experience of violence in intimate partnerships among Canadian military populations, and current IPV research often fails to capture certain nuances of IPV. There are currently only three published population-based studies on military personnel. These studies indicate that:
 - 10%-19% of men used violence during the course of their current relationship.¹⁴
 - 1% of men experienced physical IPV in their lifetime¹⁵, while 16%-26% experienced violence during their current relationship.¹⁴
 - 9%-19% of women used violence during their current relationship.¹⁴
 - 7% of women experienced physical IPV in their lifetime¹⁵, while 8%-22% experienced violence during their current relationship.¹⁰
 - 12%-26% of men and women report experiencing violence during their current relationship.¹⁶
- Of note, we anticipate that rates reported above may be conservative in relation to true estimates due to factors including:
- Of note, we anticipate that rates reported above may be conservative in relation to true estimates due to factors including:
 - Under-reporting of IPV due to fear of repercussions, e.g., escalated abuse from their partners, fear of losing a partner's income.
 - Research not assessing the severity and impact of IPV, e.g., fear and injury.
 - Current measures of IPV ignoring the context in which it occurs, e.g., was the physical violence initiated or in retaliation?
- No studies have been conducted on Veterans.
- Reports of experiencing physical and sexual IPV is four to five times higher in active duty members compared to civilians. Emotional and financial IPV is two to three times higher in active duty personnel compared to civilians.^{9,14}

Gaps in the Canadian literature

- No research investigated IPV in Veterans.
- Only one study investigated IPV perpetration among men and women in the military.
- There is limited information regarding the severity, impact, and context for violence (including coercive and controlling behaviours), for example, the psychological injuries from violent behaviours or whether the violence was in self-defense.
- Limited comparisons can be drawn between use of IPV in military and civilian contexts as too few studies have been conducted in both populations.
- No research investigated IPV in the context of same-sex relationships or diverse genders within a Canadian military context.

- The federal government has implemented a strategy to address the experience of gender-based violence and improve health and social outcomes in victims through three pillars:
 - Preventing gender-based violence,
 - Support for victims and families and,
 - Promotion of legal and justice responses.
- In addition, the Gender-Based Violence Knowledge Centre has been established to coordinate the government's strategy, undertake research, and mobilise knowledge of outcomes through an accessible online platform.
- A comprehensive strategy to address the use of IPV is lacking, with the majority of Canadian initiatives and research focussed on experiences of IPV.
- At this point in time, there are no peer-reviewed studies detailing the identification, prevention, and treatment of IPV in Canadian military or Veteran-specific health services. However, the Canadian Armed Forces, through funding from Department of National Defence, has established Family Crisis Teams at Canadian Wings and Bases. The teams comprise of military and civilians specialists, including social workers, chaplains, and military policy. They provide support services and programs such as education and awareness for violence prevention, as well as tools for individuals who use or experience partner violence^{17, 18}.
- US research has highlighted several forms of interventions, including screening and assessment measures, and brief counselling and psychological treatment¹⁹, which could be implemented and evaluated within Canadian military or Veteran systems.

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