

**The Role of Law Enforcement in the Implementation of Legislations Related to Intimate
Partner Violence in Canada**

Cheenu Sharma (Cohort #10)

J0478510

School of Criminal Justice & Security, Justice Institute of British Columbia

Author Note

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Abstract

This research paper examines the role of law enforcement in the implementation of legislations related to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Canada, assessing the effectiveness of these policies within real-world enforcement practices. Through a comprehensive literature review, the study underscores the high prevalence of IPV, particularly among young women and marginalized communities, alongside the limitations in data collection that contribute to widespread underreporting. It further identifies systemic challenges within law enforcement, including implicit bias and inadequate cultural competency, which hinder effective responses to IPV. The research highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding varied victim experiences and critiques existing policies for not adequately empowering all affected individuals. Key recommendations include broadening data collection approaches, enhancing law enforcement training, and integrating health and social services into IPV interventions. This study aims to contribute to more equitable, informed, and effective law enforcement responses to IPV, ultimately supporting the safety and well-being of all victims in Canada.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Canada, Law Enforcement, Legislation, Intersectionality, Data Collection, Victim Support, Systemic Barriers

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The Role of Law Enforcement in the Implementation of Legislations Related to Intimate Partner Violence in Canada

Intimate partner violence (IPV), also known as domestic violence, refers to actions by a current or former partner that may lead to physical, sexual, or psychological harm (Stewart et al., 2020). IPV can appear in various forms, including physical, economic, sexual, and emotional abuse, with some authorities also recognizing stalking and financial abuse as forms of IPV (Government of Canada, 2023; Stewart et al., 2020). A major challenge in addressing IPV is the persistent the need for greater diversity among police officers, particularly in terms of gender and language skills (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020). With Canada's increasingly diverse population, officers who can communicate effectively in multiple languages and bring varied cultural perspectives are vital to fostering trust and improving responsiveness in IPV cases (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020). Overall, IPV remains a significant social issue in Canada, affecting people across different demographics, including genders, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Burczycka, 2019).

Background

In 2019, statistics revealed that over 100,000 Canadians aged 15 to 89 experienced IPV, accounting for nearly 30% of all violent crimes reported to the police, a 6% rise from 2018 (Burczycka, 2019). Despite legislative advancements and increased societal awareness, IPV cases continue to be largely underreported, with victims facing numerous barriers to disclosing their experiences (Heron & Eisma, 2021). The underreporting of IPV is influenced by various social and cultural factors, including the "gender paradigm" that frequently centres on violence against women (Dutton, 2010; Dutton, 2011). Societal norms further hinder men from reporting IPV due to stigmatization and restrictive notions of masculinity, which associate vulnerability with shame (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Goodey, 1997; Stanko &

Hobdell, 1993). Canadian research, including national population surveys, highlights demographic factors linked to IPV, such as younger partners, common-law relationships over legal marriages, and separation (Savage, 2021; Stewart et al., 2020). Other factors include socioeconomic stresses, such as low income, high stress, and substance misuse, which are often correlated with increased IPV risk (Stewart et al., 2020). Qualitative analyses revealed that police officers encounter various challenges when responding to IPV, which include obstacles at systemic, organizational, and individual levels (Saxton et al., 2022). Therefore, this study will analyse the current role of law enforcement in the implementation of legislative measures governing IPV in Canada, focusing on issues related to enforcement practices, accessibility to justice, and disparities in support. The aim is to provide a comprehensive overview of how effectively law enforcement contributes to addressing IPV through existing legislation.

Statement of Problem and Purpose of Study

IPV remains a pervasive issue in Canada, with qualitative analyses revealing significant challenges faced by police officers in responding effectively to such incidents. These challenges arise from systemic, organizational, and individual barriers, leading to inconsistent police responses, particularly in risk assessment and management for affected families (Saxton et al., 2022). Data from the Canadian Homicide Survey and the Canadian Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCRS) highlight alarming discrepancies between police-reported and self-reported IPV. In 2016, 79 % of IPV cases reported to law enforcement identified women as victims, with men comprising 80 % of those charged. While the majority of police-reported IPV (82 %) involves heterosexual partnerships, where women are typically the victims and men the perpetrators, approximately 55 % of police-reported same-sex IPV cases involve male partnerships (Stewart et al., 2020).

This research aims to investigate the role of law enforcement in the implementation of current legislative reforms related to IPV in Canada. It will evaluate how effectively these reforms are being applied in practice, identify the real-world challenges that survivors face when interacting with law enforcement, and explore additional strategies for preventing IPV. Additionally, the study will assess how these reforms impact marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous and immigrant populations, to develop comprehensive solutions that improve prevention and intervention efforts in addressing IPV. The research will also identify gaps in existing policies regarding the role of law enforcement in addressing IPV, evaluate the practical challenges encountered by survivors, and explore additional strategies for enhancing prevention and intervention efforts. This study aims to deepen the understanding of IPV in Canada and inform future improvements in policy and law enforcement practices.

Research Question

The research aims to answer a quintessential question as *how effectively law enforcement is playing role in implementing and enforcing current IPV-related legislations in Canada?*

Philosophical Worldview

The research adopts an advocacy/ participatory worldview. It is a belief that research should be closely connected to politics and political agendas, incorporating an action plan aimed at reform (Petersen & Gencel, 2013). The study highlights the need to evaluate both legislative and social aspects to comprehensively understand the effectiveness of reforms and support systems. This approach seeks to create interventions that can lead to meaningful changes in the lives of the participants involved (Petersen & Gencel, 2013). Henceforth, by integrating stakeholder's perspectives and focusing on actionable outcomes, the research aims to influence

policy and practice, ensuring that reforms address real-world challenges and improve the support available to IPV survivors.

Scope of the Project

This research delves into the critical role of law enforcement in implementing legislation related to intimate partner violence (IPV) in Canada, with a comprehensive scope that evaluates both current and proposed legal reforms. By rigorously assessing the effectiveness of these legal frameworks, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations that can guide policymakers toward enhancing IPV prevention and intervention strategies. Emphasizing the real-world application of laws, this research will analyse how effectively these measures serve diverse populations, thus offering a nuanced view of legislative impact and implementation outcomes. In addressing policy gaps and highlighting the need for cohesive support systems, this study aspires to make significant contributions toward improving both legal and social responses to IPV in Canada.

Literature Review

IPV remains a significant public safety concern in Canada, with law enforcement playing a crucial role in its prevention and intervention. This literature review critically examines the themes emerging from recent research on IPV in Canada, focusing on law enforcement's response, the intersection of victim characteristics with police intervention, and the gaps in public policy. Various critical themes have been drawn from 15 key research articles.

I. Law Enforcement Barriers

A. Systemic and Organizational Barriers

Law enforcement's role in IPV intervention is fraught with challenges, as detailed in Saxton et al.'s (2022) "Complexities of the Police Response to Intimate Partner Violence: Police Officers' Perspectives on the Challenges of Keeping Families Safe." The study identifies several systemic and organizational barriers that hinder effective police intervention, including inadequate resources, inconsistencies in risk assessment, and a lack of coordination with social services (Saxton et al., 2022). The research highlights that while officers are often on the frontline of responding to IPV, they face significant personal and emotional challenges in dealing with complex family dynamics (Saxton et al.'s, 2022). These barriers can lead to inconsistent responses, putting victims at further risk.

B. Inconsistency in Response to Victims

Similarly, Saxton et al. (2021) discuss the experiences of IPV victims with police and the justice system in Canada. The study put emphasizes on the mixed reactions victims have towards law enforcement (Saxton et al., 2021). The study reveals that while some survivors find the police response helpful, others feel the system fails to provide adequate support (Saxton et al., 2021). This inconsistency in victim experiences suggests a need for more uniform policies and training focused on IPV response. The research from Barrett et al. (2011) in "Police Response to Intimate Partner Violence in Canada: Do Victim Characteristics Matter?", further illustrates the discrepancies in police interventions based on victim characteristics such as race, economic status, and social background. This study raises critical concerns about potential biases in law enforcement responses and calls for reforms that ensure equitable protection for all victims, regardless of their sociodemographic background (Barrett et al., 2011). In their study, Addis and Mahalik (2003) examine help-seeking behaviours among men, arguing that traditional notions of masculinity may hinder their willingness to seek assistance. The authors propose that understanding the social construction of masculinity can inform strategies to enhance help-seeking behaviours among

men facing IPV (Addis and Mahalik, 2003). This perspective is vital for developing more inclusive approaches to IPV intervention.

C. Representation of Women in Law Enforcement

The presence of female officers in law enforcement has steadily progressed since the late 1800s; however, women remain significantly underrepresented and underutilized by police agencies (Marshall, 2013). Despite advances in federal legislation aimed at promoting gender equality, female officers continue to face barriers that limit their career growth (Marshall, 2013). This underrepresentation raises questions about whether it is a product of longstanding bias in this male-dominated field or the result of personal choices by women to avoid the profession (Marshall, 2013). Research suggests that achieving success as a female officer often depends on a critical mass of women within the force, which remains lacking (Marshall, 2013).

The challenges women face in policing mirror broader issues encountered by women entering traditionally male occupations (Marshall, 2013). For instance, while women in policing have increased in number over the past two decades, they still encounter gender discrimination and harassment. Even as many police departments have taken steps, sometimes under court orders, to remove discriminatory practices, women still encounter numerous obstacles to full integration (Marshall, 2013). Community organizations, advocacy groups, and constituents are increasingly pressuring police departments to diversify their ranks, including hiring more women and minority officers (Raganella & White, 2004).

In a profession historically seen as male-oriented, gender stereotypes and certain biases among male officers continue to hinder the recruitment and retention of skilled women (Raganella & White, 2004). Studies have shown that police culture is heavily masculine, and women who succeed in this field often face pressures to conform to traditionally masculine

traits, such as physical toughness, to gain acceptance (Raganella & White, 2004). This expectation creates an unspoken belief within police organizations that only women who demonstrate certain “masculine” qualities can be effective officers (Raganella & White, 2004). Success among women in law enforcement can disrupt the traditional male-dominated image of policing, with some male officers perceiving this as a threat to their status (Marshall, 2013). Male resistance to fully accepting women in all policing roles stems from lingering stereotypes that paint women as physically weak, overly emotional, or mentally less capable (Marshall, 2013). These barriers reflect not only individual biases but also a broader patriarchal structure within police organizations (Marshall, 2013). This sub-theme of female representation in law enforcement highlights a critical systemic barrier in the enforcement of IPV legislation.

II. Prevalence and Victim Characteristics

Several studies highlight the widespread nature of IPV in Canada, particularly among young women. Savage’s (2021) research on “Intimate Partner Violence: Experiences of Young Women in Canada, 2018” provides a detailed account of the alarming rates of violence experienced by women aged 15 - 24. The study draws attention to how younger women are disproportionately at risk, with 29% of them reporting IPV compared to 10% of women aged 25 and older (Savage, 2021). Furthermore, younger women are more likely to face severe forms of abuse, including sexual and physical violence (Savage, 2021). For instance, 8% of women aged 15–19 reported sexual assault by a partner, compared to just 1% of older women (Savage, 2021).

This finding is consistent with Burczycka’s (2019), “Police-reported Intimate Partner Violence in Canada, 2018,” where nearly 30% of all violent crimes reported to police were related to IPV. A critical insight from Burczycka’s study is that while police data provide a

grounded, empirical view of IPV prevalence, the statistics likely underestimate the issue, as many victims do not report abuse to law enforcement (Burczycka, 2019). This underreporting is a significant limitation of the available data. Both Savage and Burczycka's studies underscore the need for more nuanced approaches to addressing the specific vulnerabilities of young women in IPV cases. Policymakers must focus on the unique psychological and emotional challenges these individuals face, ensuring that resources and support systems are tailored to their needs. According to Ansara and Hindin (2010), IPV encompasses a range of behaviours, including physical violence, sexual coercion, and psychological abuse. Their research emphasizes that traditional definitions of IPV often fail to capture the complex nature of abusive relationships, particularly regarding coercive control and the varied experiences of victims (Ansara & Hindin, 2010). Their study highlights the need for a broader conceptual framework to understand IPV's impact on health and help-seeking behaviours (Ansara & Hindin, 2010).

III. Intersectionality and Marginalized Communities

A. Male Victims

Thandi's (2012) qualitative study on "Working with South Asian Male Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence in British Columbia, Canada" identifies unique challenges faced by South Asian men in IPV situations, such as patriarchal attitudes, immigration-related stresses, and acculturation difficulties. These factors not only complicate efforts to intervene but also highlight the importance of culturally specific support systems in dealing with IPV among immigrant populations. Further, the scoping review by Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018) on IPV in Canada's immigrant communities highlights a significant gap in understanding and addressing the experiences of male victims of intimate partner violence. While much of the research and existing policies focus on female survivors, male victims, particularly within

immigrant populations, are often overlooked (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). Immigrant men may face unique challenges in seeking help due to cultural norms surrounding masculinity, fear of stigma, and a lack of culturally appropriate services (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). The review underscores the importance of expanding IPV research to include male victims, recognizing that gendered power dynamics and social expectations play a role in how men experience and respond to IPV (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). By broadening the scope of IPV research and services to include male victims, particularly in immigrant communities, policymakers can ensure more inclusive and effective interventions that address the diverse needs of all survivors of IPV (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018).

B. Toward Equitable and Trauma-Informed Interventions

Wathen et al.'s (2024), "A Scoping Review of Intimate Partner Violence Research in Canada" also underscores the gap in research focused on Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The review points out that while much of the research to date has centered on white, cisgender women, marginalized populations remain underrepresented (Wathen et al., 2024). This underrepresentation extends to law enforcement interventions, where the needs of these communities are often overlooked, leading to inequitable access to resources and justice (Wathen et al., 2024). Wathen's review emphasizes the need for more equity-promoting research that addresses the specific vulnerabilities of these groups (Wathen et al., 2024). Policymakers and service providers must prioritize trauma- and violence-informed frameworks to ensure that all victims of IPV, regardless of background, receive appropriate and effective interventions (Wathen et al., 2024). Belfrage et al. (2012) investigate the use of the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Guide (SARA) by police officers in Sweden, highlighting its predictive validity in assessing IPV risk. Their findings suggest that structured risk assessments can improve the management of IPV cases and reduce recidivism (Belfrage et al., 2012). This

study underscores the importance of effective risk assessment tools in law enforcement's response to IPV (Belfrage et al., 2012).

IV. Ethical Dilemmas in Healthcare Response to IPV

IPV presents complex ethical challenges for healthcare providers, particularly concerning patient autonomy and the duty to protect (Cook & Dickens, 2009). IPV, primarily characterized by male-perpetrated violence against women, is a pervasive global issue that often leads to injuries ranging from bruises and abrasions to severe harm, hospitalization, or even death in extreme cases (Cook & Dickens, 2009). Pregnancy can sometimes heighten IPV risks, but this may be attributed to pregnant women's increased interaction with healthcare professionals, which could make IPV more detectable during medical visits (Cook & Dickens, 2009). IPV often surfaces when women seek medical assistance due to physical health complaints or emotional distress, such as depression. In these instances, providers may feel an ethical and legal obligation to involve law enforcement, especially when there is a perception of immediate risk. However, this raises ethical concerns if the patient does not consent, as some victims may fear the potential consequences, like loss of financial support or care for their children if their partners are detained (Cook & Dickens, 2009).

The ethical principle of "Do No Harm" is central to healthcare practice and becomes complex in cases of IPV (Cook & Dickens, 2009). While providing treatment for injuries, healthcare professionals face dilemmas about whether their duty of care includes taking preventive action to protect patients from future violence (Cook & Dickens, 2009). Balancing the immediate health needs with preventive intervention becomes challenging, as respecting patient autonomy must be weighed against the potential harm of inaction (Cook & Dickens, 2009). Furthermore, legal reforms, such as criminalizing spousal rape, aim to support women's rights to autonomy and safety but also bring additional challenges when patients are hesitant to pursue

legal action (Cook & Dickens, 2009). Advocates and healthcare professionals argue for a greater emphasis on awareness, professional training, and systemic support to help identify IPV cases effectively and respond in ways that protect patient rights while ensuring safety and well-being (Cook & Dickens, 2009). Furthermore, the recognition of IPV as a significant health issue linked to HIV spread, mental and emotional distress, substance abuse, serious injuries, and mortality has brought about complex ethical dilemmas, particularly in low-income settings (Mannell & Guta, 2017). IPV research within the global health framework raises unique ethical challenges, as discussed in Mannell and Guta's (2017) analysis of a qualitative study conducted in Rwanda.

V. Shifting Beyond the Traditional Narrative

A prominent theme in the literature involves the critical examination of gender paradigms in IPV. Historically, the dominant perspective on IPV has portrayed it as an issue predominantly involving male perpetrators and female victims (Dutton, 2010; Winterdyk et al., 2017). This "gender paradigm" is widely discussed in the works of Dutton (2010) and Winterdyk et al. (2017). Dutton (2010) critiques the traditional framing of IPV as primarily male-driven, arguing that female-perpetrated violence is often overlooked. This narrow lens not only perpetuates stereotypes about masculinity and femininity but also ignores the complexities of IPV dynamics, including the motivations behind female aggression and the contextual factors that may contribute to these behaviors. Winterdyk et al. (2017) similarly highlight the limitations of focusing exclusively on gender in understanding IPV. They assert that this limited perspective fails to account for the broader societal and cultural factors that contribute to violence in intimate relationships (Dutton, 2010; Winterdyk et al., 2017). By solely attributing violence to gender, we risk oversimplifying the issue and neglecting other critical variables such as socioeconomic status, mental health, and experiences of trauma among both men and women (Dutton, 2010; Winterdyk et al., 2017). This perspective also detracts from recognizing the

diverse forms of victimization that can occur, including violence against men, which is often underreported and stigmatized (Dutton, 2010; Winterdyk et al., 2017).

Moreover, the traditional narrative can obscure the experiences of marginalized populations, such as LGBTQ+ individuals and those from different cultural backgrounds, who may face unique challenges in the context of IPV (Dutton, 2010; Winterdyk et al., 2017). Recognizing this diversity is crucial for developing inclusive policies that can effectively address the needs of all victims, rather than perpetuating a one-size-fits-all approach that primarily focuses on heterosexual relationships (Dutton, 2010; Winterdyk et al., 2017). The shift away from the traditional gender narrative is essential for understanding the true scope of IPV and crafting legislation that addresses the needs of all victims, regardless of gender (Dutton, 2010; Winterdyk et al., 2017).

According to Mannell and Guta (2017), one another issue is highlighting IPV in communities with limited economic resources for affected women, potentially exacerbating their vulnerability without offering practical support. Additionally, conducting interviews in settings with heavy governmental surveillance risks participant confidentiality, raising concerns about the ethical use of personal narratives, which may inadvertently reinforce victim stereotypes rather than empower local voices (Mannell and Guta, 2017). Furthermore, framing IPV as a detached global health issue, rather than integrating it into broader feminist advocacy, risks depoliticizing the issue and missing its socio-cultural roots (Mannell and Guta, 2017). Mannell and Guta (2017) thus recommend that IPV research ethics should be highly context-specific, adapting to the unique social, economic, and cultural realities of the communities studied.

Gaps in Policy and Legal Reforms

The need for comprehensive legal reforms is evident throughout the literature. Paterson's (2009) critique of "(Re)Constructing Women's Resistance to Woman Abuse: Resources, Strategy Choice and Implications of and for Public Policy in Canada" highlights the shortcomings of Canada's anti-abuse policies. The study argues that the current policy framework limits women's autonomy and choice in resisting abuse, and suggests that reforms must focus on empowering women, particularly those from marginalized communities, to take control of their resistance strategies (Paterson, 2009). Winterdyk et al. (2017) stress the importance of universal screening and evidence-based prevention programs but also notes the challenges in enforcing these strategies consistently across different legal and cultural systems. Dutton (2010) challenges the traditional gender-based views of IPV, arguing that male perpetrators are not the sole drivers of intimate violence. Aspinall et al. (2024) explore the preparedness of Canadian police to assess coercive control in IPV cases, identifying gaps in police training and resources. Their research emphasizes the need for comprehensive training programs that equip officers with the skills to recognize and respond to coercive control dynamics in IPV situations (Aspinall et al., 2024). These studies collectively point to significant gaps in the legal framework addressing IPV in Canada (Aspinall et al., 2024). Furthermore, standardized police training and community partnerships are critical to improving the overall effectiveness of the legal and law enforcement response to IPV (Aspinall et al., 2024).

Design and Methodology

This study employs a critical appraisal of existing literature to explore the role of law enforcement in implementing the legislations related to IPV in Canada. The primary focus is on analysing studies that address various facets of IPV legislation, including its implementation, effectiveness, and impact on affected populations. The decision to conduct a critical appraisal stem from the recognition that there is a wealth of information available

within existing academic and policy literature. An extensive search process, which included database queries, reviews of government reports, and analyses of peer-reviewed articles, revealed a substantial body of work pertinent to the research question. Consequently, no primary research was conducted, as the existing literature sufficiently addresses the core themes of the study.

Given the discrepancies and varying perspectives present in the literature regarding the effectiveness of IPV legislations, a critical appraisal is particularly suited for this research. This approach facilitates the identification of similarities, differences, and gaps across the literature, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the legislative landscape. The appraisal encompasses a broad range of studies involving diverse participant demographics and geographic locations within Canada. As the study involves secondary sources only, direct ethical concerns related to confidentiality are minimal. However, care will be taken to ensure that any representation of survivor's experiences is respectful and avoids further stigmatization or sensationalism. The outcomes of this research will not only highlight effective legislative measures but also point to areas requiring reform or further investigation.

Search Methodology

To ensure a comprehensive literature review for the study, a methodological search strategy was employed using well-defined keywords and databases. The initial keywords selection aimed at covering a wide scope of literature related to IPV and legal reforms in Canada. The primary keywords used included: intimate partner violence, partner abuse and domestic violence, and intimate partner violence in Canada. The JIBC Library (EBSCOhost) and Google Scholar were the two main resources used in the literature search. The initial search yielded a large volume of results, necessitating further refinement to narrow down to the most relevant studies.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Application of inclusion and exclusion criteria helped to improve the outcomes. In order to ensure that current information and legislation changes were included, articles between 2001 and 2024 were given priority. There were also a few overarching ideas about IPV from studies published between 1991- 2000. Articles that only addressed IPV in other countries or that came before significant legal changes in Canada were also disqualified, as were those that avoided discussing the legal ramifications of IPV and instead concentrated on its social or psychological components. Using the inclusion - exclusion criteria, the search parameters were adjusted to provide a more targeted search that focuses on the legal issues of IPV in Canada. The results from both JIBC Library and Google Scholar are mentioned in Appendix A.

Final Article Assessment and Selection

More pertinent material was successfully found using the search methods. The implementation of rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria was essential to this procedure, which was carried out through a top-down methodology. First, the article's titles were examined for relevancy. Analyses of the abstract and conclusion were conducted if the title satisfied the requirements. Articles that stayed within the parameters of the study were chosen for thorough assessment; those that strayed were not. After the articles were chosen, it was crucial to evaluate each one for validity, accuracy, and trustworthiness. When data pertaining to Canada were unavailable, publications from other jurisdictions were used as a point of comparison.

Results**Overview of Findings**

A review of the literature on IPV in Canada uncovers key themes regarding the role of law enforcement, the experiences of victims, and systemic challenges. Findings reveal that IPV remains a widespread issue affecting various populations across Canada and point to significant shortcomings in current law enforcement policies and practices. This section connects these findings to the research question by examining both the strengths and limitations of existing studies, highlighting where law enforcement has been effective and where critical gaps persist in IPV legislation implementation.

Key Findings and Relation to the Research Question

The literature highlights notable gaps and inconsistencies in law enforcement's role in handling IPV cases in Canada. Data from sources such as the Canadian Homicide Survey and the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCRS) underscore a substantial discrepancy between police-reported and self-reported IPV incidents, with significantly lower police-reported cases (Stewart et al., 2020). For example, in 2016, 79% of police-reported IPV cases involved female victims, with males making up 80% of those charged. While heterosexual relationships make up 82% of reported IPV cases, male same-sex IPV is also significant, comprising about 55% of incidents (Stewart et al., 2020). This finding points to the limited scope in police recognition and reporting, which may hinder effective intervention.

Further, IPV involving current or former intimate partners is the most common form of violence reported to the police by women. In 2017, around 80% of IPV incidents reported involved women and girls, with a significant number of cases involving young women aged 15 - 24. This group reported high rates of victimization, with over 15,000 police-reported incidents in 2017, highlighting the need for targeted legislative measures to address their unique vulnerabilities. Police data also show that IPV extends beyond physical violence to include psychological abuse and control tactics, with 8% of women and 6% of men reporting

such behaviors. Despite this, many IPV cases go unreported due to fears of retaliation, shame, or a lack of trust in police responses (Stewart et al., 2020; Saxton et al., 2022).

Bilateral violence, where both partners are involved in violent acts, also presents a challenge. While it often involves less severe forms of violence, women remain at greater risk of injury and trauma from severe IPV, such as sexual assault and stalking, with high rates of police-reported injuries and attempted murder cases among women compared to men (Stewart et al., 2020). These dynamics suggest the need for law enforcement to adopt differentiated, trauma-informed approaches that consider both gendered and situational aspects of IPV. Public perception of law enforcement's handling of IPV is often negative, with victims reporting low confidence in police response fairness, efficiency, and community safety. This gap in trust highlights the need for improved officer training focused on relational skills and nuanced IPV response strategies to foster better victim interactions and consistent, supportive responses across Canada (Barrett et al., 2019).

Savage (2021) and Burczycka (2019) emphasize high IPV rates among young women, who often face compounded vulnerabilities. Savage reports that approximately 29% of women aged 15 - 24 experience IPV nearly 3 times higher than older women. Addressing this demographic requires specialized legislative and policing measures, given their unique risks. Moreover, underreporting remains a significant issue, with many victims refraining from police involvement due to stigma or limited support systems.

The work of Ansara and Hindin (2010) reveals that traditional IPV definitions may fall short in capturing its complex health implications, underscoring the need for legislative reforms that incorporate health-related considerations to holistically support victims. Meanwhile, Saxton et al. (2022) and Saxton et al. (2021) identify systemic barriers in law enforcement's IPV response, including insufficient officer training and limited collaboration

with social services, which hamper effective interventions. These findings point to the urgent need for comprehensive training programs to equip officers with skills for navigating IPV's emotional complexities. Barrett et al. (2011) draw attention to disparities in police responses based on victim demographics, raising concerns about biases that may affect support levels for various groups. Bridging these gaps is critical to ensuring justice equity for all IPV victims. Belfrage et al. (2012) recommend using structured risk assessments in police protocols, which could enhance IPV response and reduce offender recidivism rates. By incorporating evidence-based practices, law enforcement could improve its handling of IPV cases and outcomes for victims.

The review of studies examining the prevalence of IPV during pregnancy reveals alarming statistics across various countries, indicating both the scope and severity of IPV in different cultural contexts. In an antenatal booking assessment in Ireland, 12.9% of 481 women reported a history of IPV (Cook & Dickens, 2009). Similarly, 18% of 2,199 women surveyed in India reported experiencing domestic violence during their most recent pregnancy, and in Uganda, 27.7% of 612 pregnant women screened in their second trimester reported such violence (Cook & Dickens, 2009). In northern England, 17% of 475 pregnant women disclosed histories of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, while in Japan, 5.4% of 279 pregnant women reported IPV experiences (Cook & Dickens, 2009). In Turkey, 9.7% of 217 women reported being physically abused by their partner during their last pregnancy (Cook & Dickens, 2009). This data is illustrated in Figure 1 in the Appendix B. Although IPV is theoretically gender-neutral, it largely involves male-perpetrated violence against women, and its reported prevalence varies based on definitions that range from cohabiting heterosexual couples to broader categories encompassing past or present relationships, whether heterosexual or same-sex (Cook & Dickens, 2009).

Research by Thandi (2012) and Wathen et al. (2024) highlights how IPV disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. These studies emphasize the urgent need for inclusive policies that address the specific challenges these populations face. Policymakers must prioritize legislative reforms that ensure equitable access to justice and support for all victims, recognizing the unique vulnerabilities in marginalized communities. Paterson (2009) and Dutton (2010) critique existing IPV legal frameworks for failing to account for the complex dynamics of IPV, including the experiences of both male and female victims and perpetrators. Expanding these frameworks to include diverse IPV experiences is essential for fostering a nuanced, gender-sensitive approach to policymaking.

Additionally, Dutton and Winterdyk et al. (2017) advocate for revisiting traditional gender paradigms in IPV discussions, suggesting that recognizing IPV's multifaceted nature will result in more accurate legislative and policing policies. Moreover, Okeke-Ihejirika et al.'s (2018) study highlights that immigrant, while viewed as an asset to Canadian society in terms of population growth, labour supply, and cultural diversity, often face significant struggles with IPV upon arrival. These struggles stem from limited support networks, the need to adapt to changing family dynamics, and the challenge of navigating new gender roles within Canadian society. A major finding from the review is the variation in perceptions and responses to IPV across immigrant communities. The research suggests that there is a tendency to attribute IPV to cultural values and practices brought by immigrants, particularly among Southeast Asian communities in the Greater Toronto Area. This finding raises concerns about the risks of stigmatizing immigrant cultures and overlooking the structural factors that contribute to IPV, such as gender inequality and economic stressors. The study also highlights a significant gap in the current services and policies aimed at addressing IPV, which are often not tailored to the unique needs of immigrant women. As a result, these policies may inadvertently hinder women's

ability to seek help or find effective solutions to their situations.

Furthermore, the study calls attention to the lack of research on male victims of IPV within immigrant populations, pointing out that current literature is overwhelmingly focused on female survivors. This gap limits the scope of IPV interventions and services, which fail to account for the diverse experiences of all victims, including men and non-heterosexual couples. The findings stress the importance of broadening future research to include these overlooked groups and to incorporate the perspectives of stakeholders beyond just survivors. This would ensure that the responses to IPV are more inclusive and effective, promoting equity for all members of immigrant communities (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). Lastly, the findings from Aspinall et al. (2024) underscore the need for enhanced police training to effectively assess and address coercive control within IPV situations. By recognizing and proactively responding to these behaviours, law enforcement can adopt more tailored, effective IPV intervention strategies that align with Canada's evolving legislative framework.

Strengths of Research

The reviewed studies collectively contribute to a rich and nuanced understanding of IPV in Canada, showcasing various dimensions such as prevalence, victim characteristics, systemic barriers, and the critical role of intersectionality. One of the notable strengths of this body of research is its diversity in perspectives; the literature encompasses a range of populations, including young women, marginalized communities, and different gender identities, which allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the complexities surrounding IPV. This multifaceted approach enhances the understanding of how various factors, such as socio-economic status, cultural background, and gender norms, intersect to shape the experiences of victims. Additionally, many of the studies are grounded in empirical evidence, utilizing robust

data to support their findings. This empirical foundation lends credibility to the arguments made for necessary legislative reforms aimed at improving the response to IPV. Furthermore, the emphasis on intersectionality within the research highlights the urgent need to address equity in IPV responses, ensuring that the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups are not overlooked. By bringing attention to these diverse experiences, the research advocates for more inclusive and effective policy changes that can cater to the needs of all individuals affected by IPV.

Weaknesses of Research

Despite strengths, several weaknesses were identified that limit the overall efficacy of the research. A significant concern is the underreporting of data, particularly in studies relying on police-reported statistics, which often fail to capture the full scope of IPV. This underreporting can lead to a skewed understanding of the prevalence and nature of IPV, obscuring the reality faced by many victims who do not seek help or report their experiences to law enforcement. Additionally, some studies have a limited scope, focusing primarily on specific populations or demographics, which can result in the exclusion of valuable insights from other groups affected by IPV. This narrow focus may hinder the development of comprehensive strategies that address the needs of all individuals experiencing IPV. Lastly, the lack of longitudinal studies is a notable limitation within the body of research. Most studies are cross-sectional, which restricts the ability to assess the long-term effects of IPV on victims and the effectiveness of interventions over time. By not examining these dynamics, the research may miss crucial opportunities to inform more sustainable and impactful policy measures.

Reflections on Data Selection

While the literature review effectively highlights critical themes and findings related to IPV, there are notable areas for improvement in data selection that could enhance the robustness of future research. One key consideration is the potential for broader inclusion criteria when selecting studies. By expanding the criteria to encompass a wider range of populations and contexts, researchers could achieve a more comprehensive understanding of IPV, capturing the diverse experiences and challenges faced by various groups. This inclusivity would help illuminate the nuanced factors influencing IPV dynamics and facilitate the development of tailored interventions that cater to the unique needs of different communities.

Moreover, an increased emphasis on qualitative research is essential for deepening the insights into victim experiences and law enforcement responses. Qualitative studies can provide rich, contextualized narratives that highlight the lived experiences of victims and their interactions with the justice system, offering perspectives that quantitative data may overlook. This qualitative lens could foster a more empathetic understanding of the complexities surrounding IPV and enhance the ability to create supportive environments for victims seeking help. Additionally, prioritizing longitudinal studies would be beneficial for the field. Longitudinal research designs enable researchers to track changes over time, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the long-term effects of IPV and the sustainability of various interventions. By focusing on the evolution of victim's experiences and the effectiveness of support systems over time, researchers can better inform policy development and intervention strategies. Collectively, these enhancements in data selection would contribute to a more nuanced and effective understanding of IPV, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for victims and more responsive law enforcement practices.

Discussion

Reimagining Law Enforcement's Role in IPV Intervention

The literature emphasizes the need to reimagine the role of law enforcement in intimate partner violence (IPV) cases, especially given the constraints posed by systemic and organizational barriers. Studies by Saxton et al. (2021, 2022) reveal that current police training and resources often fail to address the complex nature of IPV, which extends beyond visible physical abuse to include less obvious forms such as coercive control and psychological abuse. This underscores a need for standardized, trauma-informed frameworks across all police jurisdictions in Canada to ensure consistent and sensitive responses to all IPV cases, irrespective of resource disparities. Furthermore, supporting law enforcement officers themselves is crucial. The emotional toll of working on IPV cases often goes unnoticed, yet providing psychological resources and resilience training for officers could enhance their responses and reduce burnout, ultimately benefiting both police and victims. Standardizing these resources would allow officers to approach IPV cases with increased empathy and professionalism.

Addressing Diversity in Victim and Offender Profiles

An intersectional approach is essential in understanding and addressing IPV among Canada's diverse communities. Traditional law enforcement responses often overlook cultural and socioeconomic nuances, leading to disparities in intervention and outcomes. Wathen et al. (2024) highlight gaps in addressing the needs of marginalized groups, such as Indigenous, racialized, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Developing culturally specific training for officers would allow for more sensitive handling of cases, considering unique factors such as acculturation stress and stigma in marginalized communities. Training could also emphasize awareness of IPV dynamics within LGBTQ+ relationships, where typical heteronormative assumptions may not apply. Culturally attuned responses could increase trust between victims and law enforcement,

encouraging higher reporting rates and enabling more effective interventions. Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018) similarly emphasize that immigrant male victims face additional cultural and social stigma that often deters help-seeking. Integrating culturally informed responses would allow law enforcement to approach cases with a deeper understanding of factors like acculturation stress, family expectations, or community stigma.

Representation and Gender Dynamics in Policing

Marshall (2013) highlights the underrepresentation of women in policing and the barriers they face, including gender stereotypes and a male-dominated workplace culture. This lack of diversity limits the perspectives crucial for addressing the sensitive and often gendered aspects of IPV cases. Increasing female representation in law enforcement may bring more empathetic responses to IPV cases, benefiting victims by providing a supportive, less intimidating environment. An emphasis on gender diversity in IPV response training and policy development could also foster greater understanding and adaptability within law enforcement, allowing for improved interactions with victims of all genders.

Moving Beyond Gender Paradigms

A prominent new insight is the necessity of moving beyond the traditional gendered approach to IPV, where male perpetrators and female victims are presumed to be the norm. Dutton (2010) and Winterdyk et al. (2017) highlight the limitations of this paradigm, as it fails to consider male victims, LGBTQ+ relationships, and cases where violence may be bilateral. Embracing a more inclusive approach acknowledges that IPV is not confined to a single narrative but rather exists in diverse and complex forms, influenced by factors like mental health, trauma histories, and power dynamics. This shift would encourage law enforcement agencies and public policies to develop interventions that do not rely solely on gendered assumptions but rather use evidence-based assessments that consider the full spectrum of IPV

dynamics. Implementing such assessments, like the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA), which Belfrage et al. (2012) found to be effective in other jurisdictions, could help police identify nuanced risks and respond accordingly. These tools offer potential not only for enhanced accuracy in risk evaluation but also for advancing a comprehensive IPV intervention model that is inclusive of varied victim and offender profiles.

Toward Trauma-Informed and Victim-Centred Approaches

The discussion on policy gaps points to an urgent need for legal reforms that prioritize trauma-informed, victim-centered approaches. Current policy frameworks are often punitive rather than supportive, focusing on penalizing the offender instead of empowering the victim. Paterson's (2009) critique highlights how Canada's policies limit autonomy, especially for marginalized women, constraining their ability to make strategic choices in resisting abuse. This calls for reforms that not only penalize offenders but also enhance victim's ability to navigate the justice system with dignity and agency.

To this end, Canada's IPV policies could incorporate elements that empower victims, such as the provision of legal advocacy services and psychological support tailored to each victim's needs. Expanding legal protections, like restraining orders or relocation assistance for those in high-risk situations, would provide a safety net that allows victims greater control over their decisions. Such victim-centered policies would also benefit from an increase in community-based support systems, which have been shown to offer vital resources to those navigating the complexities of IPV.

Public Trust and Law Enforcement: Building Confidence Through Consistency

The literature reveals a notable gap between public perception and the role law enforcement is supposed to play in protecting IPV victims. Public skepticism towards police, rooted in inconsistent and, at times, inadequate responses, indicates a need for systemic changes

that can rebuild trust. Barrett et al. (2019) underlines the importance of consistent, supportive police responses to IPV cases. Strengthening this relationship could involve more transparent communication between law enforcement and communities about the processes and limitations in handling IPV, which could demystify police actions and alleviate victim's fears. Enhancing consistency in police responses might include the development of specialized IPV response units trained to handle IPV's unique challenges, such as psychological abuse and coercive control, and equipped with the resources to act swiftly and effectively. Additionally, the integration of feedback mechanisms, where victims can report on their experience with law enforcement safely and anonymously, could provide invaluable data for refining police practices and highlight areas where victim support needs enhancement.

Recommendations

Future Research

Future research should prioritize long-term, in-depth studies to assess the lasting effects of IPV on survivors and the sustainability of current interventions. Understanding how individuals' experiences evolve over time and evaluating the effectiveness of various support systems will offer insights crucial for shaping policies and practical approaches. Addressing the challenge of underreporting IPV requires researchers to promote effective data collection practices that capture a broad spectrum of victim experiences. This initiative could include employing anonymous surveys and community-focused research projects designed to uncover the true scope and complexity of IPV, extending beyond what is currently captured in official crime statistics. Collaborating with community organizations that work closely with marginalized groups will yield more representative data, revealing unique obstacles faced by these communities. This inclusive approach enhances our understanding of IPV and informs strategies that are more responsive to diverse needs.

Improving training programs for law enforcement is equally vital, as systemic barriers often limit effective intervention in IPV cases. Training initiatives focused on implicit bias, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed care are essential. By equipping officers with these skills, police departments can foster greater trust and collaboration within the communities they serve. This emphasis on specialized training not only enhances the quality of police responses to IPV but also reassures victims that their experiences will be handled with respect and empathy throughout their pursuit of assistance. Moreover, there is a pressing need for gender-neutral studies that recognize IPV as an issue affecting individuals of all genders. Future studies should investigate the experiences of male victims and female perpetrators to understand how societal perceptions and gender norms impact IPV reporting and response. Addressing these gender dynamics can provide a well-rounded view of IPV, transcending traditional narratives and stereotypes.

Practical Implications

The findings emphasize the need for legislative reforms that address the realities of IPV across diverse communities. Lawmakers should consider the unique experiences of marginalized populations and develop policies that promote inclusivity and equity in IPV responses. This may involve amending existing laws to address the complexities of gender dynamics in IPV and ensuring that all victims, regardless of their identity, receive necessary protections and resources. Engaging with communities affected by IPV is essential to understanding their specific needs and challenges. Partnering with local organizations can help create targeted interventions that resonate with victims and effectively address the obstacles they face.

This collaborative approach in policymaking can lead to solutions that are responsive and effective in addressing IPV. Raising public awareness about IPV and its impact across

different demographics is also crucial for promoting societal change. Awareness campaigns can challenge stereotypes and stigmas surrounding IPV, encouraging more victims to seek help. By normalizing conversations about IPV and its complexities, society can foster a cultural shift that prioritizes the safety and well-being of all individuals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of law enforcement in implementing IPV-related legislation in Canada faces substantial challenges that compromise the effectiveness of interventions and the safety of victims. Systemic issues, such as resource strain, inconsistent risk assessments, and insufficient collaboration with social services, hinder comprehensive support for IPV survivors (Saxton et al., 2022). The inconsistent responses victims encounter highlights a need for standardized training and policies to ensure fair, trauma-informed treatment across demographics (Barrett et al., 2011). Additionally, the underrepresentation of women in law enforcement poses limitations, as a more diverse and empathetic workforce could better address the sensitivities involved in IPV cases (Marshall, 2013).

To enhance the efficacy of law enforcement's role in IPV response, there must be a shift toward a more inclusive understanding of IPV, recognizing the experiences of male, 2SLGBTQ+, and marginalized community members (Dutton, 2010; Wathen et al., 2024). Embracing a trauma-informed approach that addresses the intersectional needs of all victims is critical in fostering equitable access to protective resources. Furthermore, strengthening collaboration between law enforcement and healthcare providers can support a more holistic approach to IPV intervention, balancing immediate victim safety with long-term preventive measures (Cook & Dickens, 2009). These shifts are essential to addressing the current gaps in public policy and ensuring that legislative frameworks on IPV achieve their intended impact in Canadian communities.

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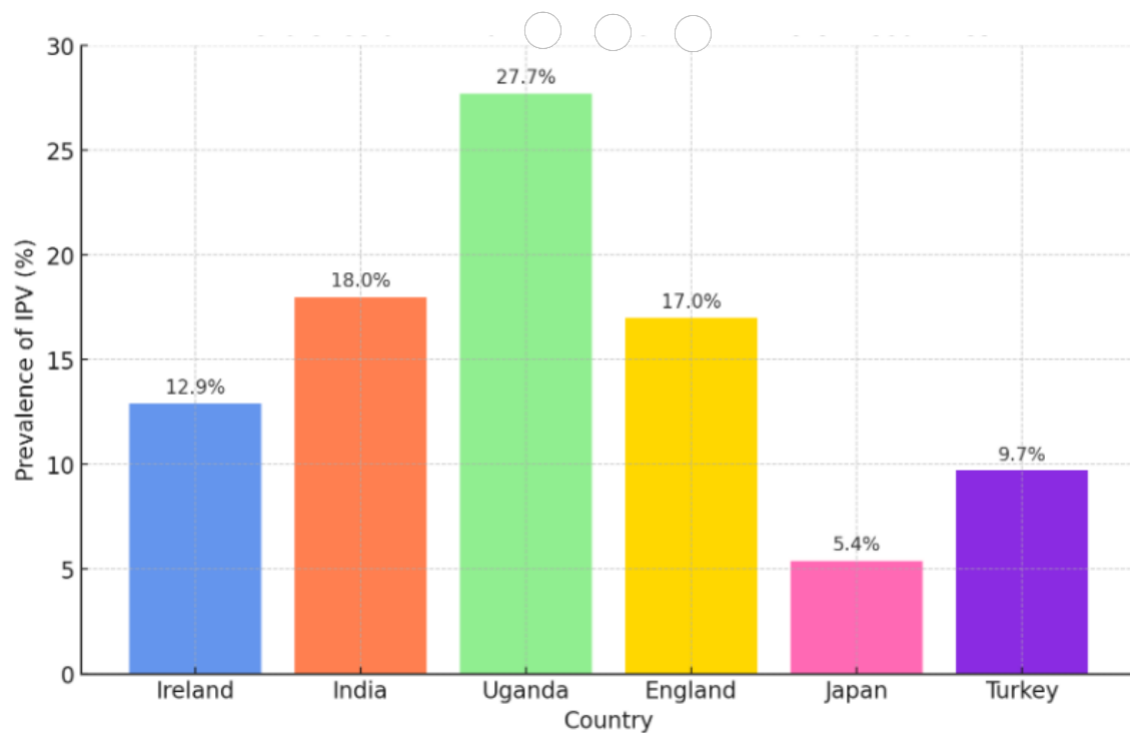
Appendices

Appendix A: Table 1

Initial and Revised Database Keyword Search and Hits

Database	Search Term(s)	Search Results	
Initial Search			
JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Intimate partner violence	149,434	
Google Scholar	Intimate partner violence	1,750,000	
JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Partner abuse and domestic violence	29,690	
Google Scholar	Partner abuse and domestic violence	966,000	
JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Intimate partner violence in Canada	5,929	
Google Scholar	Intimate partner violence in Canada	342,000	
Revised Searches			Reason for Revision
JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Intimate partner violence in Canada and legal issues	146	Refocused Approach, Increased Clarity and Applicability
Google Scholar	Intimate partner violence in Canada and legal issues	375,000	Refocused Approach, Increased Clarity and Applicability
JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Intimate partner violence OR domestic violence OR partner abuse AND Canada OR Canadian	1,143	Refocused Approach, Increased Clarity and Applicability
Google Scholar	Intimate partner violence OR domestic violence OR partner abuse AND Canada OR Canadian	1,330,000	Refocused Approach, Increased Clarity and Applicability

Note. This table summarizes the initial and revised search processes conducted to gather relevant articles for the research paper. The first column lists the databases used, the second column provides the search terms applied, and the third column shows the number of articles retrieved. The revised searches reflect adjustments made to the keywords to improve the focus, specificity, and relevance of the search results.

Appendix B: Figure 1*Prevalence of IPV During Pregnancy in Different Countries*

Note: The bar graph above illustrates the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) during pregnancy across various countries, highlighting the widespread issue in diverse cultural settings.

According to Cook and Dickens (2009), prevalence rates range significantly, with 27.7% of women in Uganda reporting IPV during their second trimester, followed by 18% in India, and 17% in northern England. In contrast, lower rates were found in Japan

(5.4%) and Turkey (9.7%), with Ireland at 12.9%. These statistics underscore the pressing need for IPV interventions, especially in prenatal care contexts. From “Dilemmas in intimate partner violence” by R.J. Cook and B.M. Dickens, 2009, *International Journal of*

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