

# Gender and Intimate Partner Violence: Differences of Formal Support Services

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## Introduction

Numerous men and women across Canada face the same troubles of escaping intimate partner violence (IPV) with a heavy reliance on formal and informal support services. In 2022 police-reported data just over 117,000 people aged 12 or older reported being victims of IPV following many others that go unreported (Government of Canada, 2024). Communities acknowledge this through formal support services such as police, courts, shelters, and counselors, however gaps remain in reaching all victims effectively. Across Canada nearly 600 shelters operate for IPV victims, yet only 4 percent of those serve male victims (Blaff, 2024). Prior research has focused on studying male and female victims separately, however few have looked at them together to understand the differences needed in formal support services efficacy. This research aims to seek strategies for implementing future and adjusting current support services to mitigate revictimization of female and male victims. Given this, the research question posed is: How does intimate partner violence formal support services differentiate between male and female victims in the Vancouver Area?

## Background

Intimate partner violence can be defined as “the physical, sexual, or psychological harm to another by a current or former partner or spouse” (Lysova & Dim, 2022, p. 1405). Formal support services can range from shelters, support groups, counselling, and police officer aid and referrals (Goodman-Williams et al., 2023). Canada has faced the effects of IPV from a victim and community standpoint. IPV is the most commonly reported violence against women at 42 percent and for men 12 percent. The aftermath of such abuse costs Canadians \$7.4 billion annually (Culleton et al., 2022). Women are most often discussed in the use of formal support services such as police referrals, shelter accommodation, and counselling. However, men struggle in reporting said violence due to stigmatization, gender roles, and lack of resources for outreach which results in informal support of family and friends being used as a replacement (Tsui et al, 2010). Encompassing roughly 660,000 residents, cities such as Vancouver formal support services are unable to cater to a wide and diverse demographic of victims within this area (Statistics Canada, 2022).

## Methods

By using a transformative worldview in secondary research, I focused on gaining inquiry of political actions that reform social oppressions for those facing it and institutions working within it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). There are limitations to the research that are addressed such as geographical location, wherein Vancouver, Canada is a research field within IPV that has not been thoroughly dissected. Results are subjected due the recognizance of the access, quality, and data structure of the obtained articles. Due to these limitations, it was crucial for selected secondary sources to be scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles with publication dates between 2005 and 2025 for current. Using the JIBC EBSCO library database I acquired a broad range of other databases such as the primary source of secondary data; APA PsycINFO. Setting the prior mentioned requirements, I focused on advanced keyword searches using "intimate partner violence", "gender-inclusive", "services" and "North America". I further expanded upon this search to include any synonyms of the original keywords to obtain the largest sample possible in the database. The final search result acquired 19 articles. Six of the articles were closely analyzed in a literature review to discover themes surrounding current gender-inclusive IPV research.

## Results

Four key themes surfaced because of the literature review that resonate to data found in IPV, gender-inclusive victim formal support services. Numerous articles were conflicted on theories used in research of IPV victims creating a divide in the resources needed to obtain adjusted measures to programs. Although Reis, E et Al (2024) article uses a gender role conflict approach to gender-inclusive IPV research others do not agree. Gender symmetry and asymmetry divide research studies on IPV and effect the inclusion of data causing conflicting results on male and female victims.

Feminist scholars often resist gender-inclusive theories, as it is viewed as diminishing female victims and focus on the gender paradigm theory in research (Lysova & Dim, 2022). The lack of consensus regarding theories used in gender-inclusive IPV research can provide conflicting data that does not provide concrete solutions to the improvement of support services. A consistent finding throughout articles noted that men are often hidden figures in IPV victims' statistics. This result is consistent with men often using informal services, only reaching to formal services once violence has become severe, and fear of being mislabeled as the perpetrator (Fagerlund, 2021).

Various articles also touched upon the difficulty male IPV survivors have in defining the word "victim". Many men face a survivor mentality that prevents them for being seen as a victim as it does not conform to traditional masculinity and emotional resilience (Fagerlund, 2021). This in turn, adds to the growing number of hidden male victims. Finally, all articles concluded that stigma around gender-based violence prevents victims from seeking help. Both men and women found a lack of education and awareness as to what constitute IPV and what resources are available within their communities. Although women are more likely to be provided support service recommendations however services are often overcrowded and unable to provide adequate needs.

## Discussion

With the use of secondary sources from the critical analysis and additional peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles, I concluded areas that require focus in further research and through institutional needs to provide improved services to male and female IPV victims. Enhancing education at an individual, communal, and institutional level, allocating appropriate community funding, and providing more ways for victims to ask for help are all steps that can be taken to enhance current formal support services. Methods that can be implemented to make sure these goals are reached are shown as the following:

- Use public service announcements, community events, and gender-inclusive training to inform people on the myths of IPV
- Institutional Risk, Need, and Responsivity model assesses the implications and efficacy of where community funding is being allocated
- Providing anonymous platforms alleviates the initial pressure of reporting IPV often seen with male victims

These measures ensure an equal ground for victims' success in avoiding revictimization.

## Conclusions or Recommendations

The literature review of IPV victims' experiences within formal support services uncovers current measures that can be implemented. Providing individuals, communities, and institutions with education in stigma and violence recognizance can eradicate myths and inform victims of their rights. Carefully managed service funding allows in-depth analysis of the programs where improvement is needed. Finally, multiple lines of communication can provide sanctity to victims and more reporting.

Much research is still to take place within Canadian IPV populations. Future research should implement a primary data approach on same-sex relationship or transgender domestic violence. Specific to Canada, would be the importance of researching data on Indigenous victims and the allocated formal services to reach their specific needs in remote or dense locations.

## References

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