

ARTICLE INVESTIGATES PREVALENCE, TYPES, AND CHRONICITY OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN ADULT WOMEN

"The present investigation focusing on intimate partner violence [IPV] prevalence in a cohort of insured, employed, educated, English-speaking U.S. women provides new knowledge on the high prevalence, several dimensions of chronicity, severity, and interrelatedness of IPV types," write the authors of an article published in the June 2006 issue of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine. IPV is widespread, with 25% to 40% of women reporting exposure in their adult lifetime, depending on the population sampled, definitions of IPV, and data-collection methods. The present investigation provides new information on the burden of suffering imposed by different IPV types (physical, sexual, psychological), the overlap among types, the chronicity of the problem (number of abusive partners, number of occurrences, time period the abuse encompassed), and the severity during women's lifetimes. Previous exposure to physical or sexual abuse as a child is also explored.

In this retrospective cohort study, IPV was identified by telephone survey of a random sample of English-speaking women ages 18-64 who were enrolled in Group Health Cooperative, a large nonprofit health maintenance organization serving approximately 550,000 members in Washington State and Northern Idaho. The final study sample included 3,429 women. IPV was defined as physical, sexual, or psychological violence between adults who were present and/or past sexual/intimate partners in heterosexual or homosexual relationships. Intimate partners were defined as current or former spouses, nonmarital partners, or dating partners in relationships lasting longer than 1 week. Partnerships could include relationships without sexual involvement.

The authors found that

* Over 14% of the women reported IPV of any type in the past 5 years, and 7.9% in the past year.

* Many women reported more than one IPV type. For example, among the 138 women with physical abuse (not sexual) in the past 5 years, 28 (20.3%) experienced physical abuse only, while 79.7% also experienced other types of IPV. Of the 138 women reporting physical abuse, 84 (60.9%) experienced a total of two to three types of IPV, and 26 (18.8%) experience four to five types.

* Between 10% and 21% (depending on IPV type) of the women who reported IPV reported abuse by two or more partners.

* The proportion of women with IPV rating it as moderately to extremely violent was 61% for physical violence, 45% for sexual intercourse, 36% for forced sexual contact, 63% for fear due to a partner's threats or anger, and 31% for controlling behavior.

* IPV risk was higher among younger women, women with lower incomes, women with less education, women who were single mothers, and women who had been exposed to any form of abuse as a child or who had witnessed IPV as a child.

The authors conclude that "from the present work, a picture emerges of both physical and non-physical IPV as very common, chronic,

intergenerational, and present in highly overlapping forms." They continue, "a cause of major morbidity and mortality, which is fourfold more common than breast cancer, cannot be ignored."

Thompson RS, Bonomi AE, Anderson M, et al. 2006. Intimate partner violence: Prevalence, types, and chronicity in adult women. American Journal of Preventive Medicine 30(6):447-457.

Readers: More information about domestic violence is available from the MCH Library's knowledge path at http://www.mchlibrary.info/KnowledgePaths/kp_domviolence.html.