THE MEN’S EXPERIENCES WITH PARTNER AGGRESSION PROJECT

Men Who Sustain Violence From Their Female Partners: Predictors of Where They Seek Help and How They Rate Those Resources—Implications for Social Service Providers and First Responders

This fact sheet and the others in this series summarize the results of a study that Drs. Denise A. Hines and Emily M. Douglas conducted in 2008 about men who sustained intimate partner violence (IPV) from their female partners and sought help. In this study, which was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, 302 men participated in an online survey; we recruited them through advertising on websites that dealt primarily with men’s issues and through the Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men and Women. Men reported about the level of IPV (psychological, sexual, and physical) that they both sustained from and perpetrated against their female partners, their mental health status (post traumatic stress, alcohol and substance use), and their experiences with seeking help. The experiences of these helpseekers were compared to a population-based or community sample of 520 men who were recruited to participate either through a random digit dial telephone or Internet survey. For more information, results, and media mentions about this study, please visit our study website.

WHAT DID WE INVESTIGATE?
The purpose of this investigation was to examine the factors that are related to which resource(s) a male helpseeker for intimate partner violence (IPV) victimization uses and how they rate the experiences with those resources. Specifically:

- What demographic characteristics and life experiences are related to where men who have sustained IPV seek help?
- What demographic characteristics and life experience are related to how men rate the helpfulness of these resources?

The demographic characteristics that we considered included: age, race/ethnicity, years of education, whether children were part of the relationship, and whether they were from a rural, urban or suburban area.

The life experiences that we considered included: childhood trauma (e.g., child sexual abuse), having abused alcohol or substances within the past year, having a diagnosis of a mental health problem, having sustained a severe physical assault from a partner within the past year, the men’s level of post-traumatic stress symptoms, and whether a false allegation has ever been made against them (e.g., falsely being accused of beating one’s partner or abusing the children in the relationship).

For information about the men in this study and where they seek help, please see the factsheet about men’s helpseeking experiences on our website.

FACTORS RELATED TO WHERE MEN SEEK HELP!
All of the men in our sample sought help somewhere, including domestic violence agencies, domestic violence hotlines, Internet, mental health providers, medical providers, and the police. A
full description of their experiences can be found in the factsheet that documents men's helpseeking experiences, which is posted on our website. We wanted to know what might be related to where a man shows up for help. Here's what we found.

**Domestic Violence Agencies**
In comparison to men who did not seek help from domestic violence agencies, those who did:

- Were about half as likely to have abused alcohol within the past year;
- Were slightly older; and
- Were over 2 times more likely to have had a false allegation made against them.

*Recap: Men who went to domestic violence agencies were older, less likely to abuse alcohol, but more likely to have false allegations made against them, as compared to those who did not go to a domestic violence agency.*

**The Internet**
In comparison to men who did not seek help via the Internet, those who did:

- Were about 80% less likely to have sustained a severe physical assault from their partner in the past year;
- Had slightly higher levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms.

*Recap: Men who sought help over the Internet experienced less severe physical abuse, but had higher levels of post-traumatic stress than men who did not use the Internet to seek resources.*

**Medical Providers**
In comparison to men who did not seek help from medical providers, men who did:

- Were almost 4 times more likely to have had a false allegation made against them;
- Were over 2½ times more likely to have sustained a very severe physical assault from their partner in the past year; and
- Were more likely to have a history of child sexual abuse.

*Recap: Men who went to medical providers were much more likely to have experienced severe physical abuse, to have had a false allegation made against them and to have a history of sexual abuse as a child—as compared with men who did not go to a medical provider.*

**Mental Health Providers**
In comparison to men who did not seek help from mental health providers, men who did:

- Were almost 3½ times more likely to have an existing mental illness diagnosis;
- Were 2½ times more likely to have minor children involved in the relationship;
- Were about 1 ½ times as likely to have had a false allegation made against them; and
- Had higher levels of education.

*Recap: Men who sought help from a mental health counselor had more education, were more likely to have a mental illness, more likely to have children, and more likely to have had a false allegation made against them—as compared to men who did not seek help from a mental health counselor.*
The Police
There were more factors related to seeking help from the police than any other type of resource. In comparison to men who did not seek help from the police, those who did:

- Were about twice as likely
  - to be from a rural location
  - to be a racial or ethnic minority
  - to have sustained a very severe assault from their partner
  - to have had a false allegation made against them
  - to have children
- Were slightly older

Recap: Men who called the police for help were more likely to be older, to have children, to be a racial/ethnic minority, to have suffered severe physical abuse, and to have had a false allegation made against them—as compared to men who did not call the police.

**FACTORS RELATED TO HOW MEN RATE THE HELPFULNESS OF THE RESOURCES**

Our previous research showed that male helpseekers did not have good experiences with most of the places where they tried to get help. Those rated as most helpful were medical providers, mental health providers, and online resources. Those rated as less helpful were domestic violence agencies, the police, and domestic violence hotlines. A full review of these findings can be found on our website.

**Domestic Violence Agencies**
For the helpfulness of Domestic Violence Agencies, we found that:

- Men who had children were about two-thirds less likely to report that this resource was helpful;
- Men who came from suburban locations (as compared to men from urban and rural locations) were about half as likely to report that this resource was helpful.

Recap: Men who had children and who lived in suburban locations had less positive experiences at domestic violence agencies than men who did not have children or who lived in other localities.

**Medical Providers**
We found that:

- Men who had a diagnosis of mental illness were about 80% less likely to report that this resource was helpful.

Recap: Men with mental health problems found medical providers less helpful when seeking help for IPV victimization than men without mental health problems.

**The Police**
We found that with regard to ratings of helpfulness of the police:

- Men who abused alcohol within the past year were almost 3 times more likely to report that the police were helpful; however
- Men who had children were less likely, by about two-thirds, to report that this resource was helpful;
- Men who sustained a very severe assault from their female partner were about half as
likely to report that this resource was helpful

- Men who exceeded a “clinical cut-off” for high levels of PTSD symptoms were about half as likely to report that this resource was helpful; and
- Men with a history of child sexual abuse were less likely, by about one-third, to report that this resource was helpful.

Recap: Men who had abused alcohol found the police to be more helpful than men without alcohol problems. That said, others were not as satisfied with their experiences, including men with children, men with a childhood history of sex abuse, men who met a clinical cutoff for PTSD, and men who suffered more physical abuse from their partners—all were less satisfied with their experiences with the police.

CONCLUSION
There was little consistency in the factors predicting when men use particular resources and how they rate these resources, but some patterns did emerge:

- Men who sustained a severe assault from their partners sought help from emergency rooms, doctors, and police officers, and were less likely to seek help through more passive means, such as the Internet.
- Men with a false allegation made against them were more likely to seek help in four of the six helpseeking areas: DV program, medical professional, mental health professional, and police. These men may be looking for ways to document their abuse experiences.
- Men with children were less likely to find the domestic violence service system—e.g., domestic violence agencies, police—helpful to them.

These findings can be useful for providers in a number of ways; for example, mental health providers and police alike could screen for any of the factors mentioned in this study, such as presence of children, which might provide direction for the provision of services and assistance.

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1 There were no factors related to which men seek help from a domestic violence hotlines.
2 There were no factors related to how men rate the helpfulness of domestic violence hotlines or mental health practitioners. Social support was related to men’s ratings of how the perceived the Internet, but this finding is not especially useful for first responders and service providers.