

Knowledge Synthesis: COVID-19 in Mental Health and Substance Use

Synthesis Title: Substance use (SU) among women in the context of the corollary pandemics of COVID-19 and intimate partner violence (IPV)

Nominated Principal Applicant:

Lorraine Greaves PhD, Senior Investigator, Centre of Excellence for Women's Health

Authors (names and affiliations): Andreea Catalina Brabete, Lorraine Greaves, Lindsay Wolfson, Julie Stinson, Sarah Allen, Nancy Poole. Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, Vancouver BC. www.bccewh.bc.ca

For more information, please contact:

Lorraine Greaves, PhD lgreaves@cw.bc.ca

Nancy Poole, PhD npoole@cw.bc.ca

<https://bccewh.bc.ca/featured-projects/covid-19-substance-use-and-intimate-partner-violence/>

Target/priority population(s) in synthesis:

First responders and providers of substance use and violence against women services.

What is the issue?

The links between, and occurrence of both IPV and SU are complex, and both appear to have risen during the COVID-19 pandemic, with potentially enduring effects on women's health. Providing current advice to health providers and first responders on how to prepare and respond to these issues is critically important.

Key messages:

- *Consequent to COVID response measures has been increased help-seeking for intimate partner violence (IPV) and indications of increased substance use (SU). Pandemic responses affect IPV and SU due to social isolation, 'stay-at-home' orders, distancing, limited service provision, unemployment, financial stress, loss of routine, additional caregiving & lack of outdoor access. Disasters are associated with IPV increases and disaster planning should include responses to IPV, trauma and mental health issues. IPV and SU are bidirectionally related but IPV impacts long term impacts on mental health, SU and trauma in women. Improved responses and interventions that address IPV and SU in the context of disasters must be developed.*

How was the synthesis conducted?

Methods: We undertook a rapid review approach to address two research questions:

RQ1. What evidence on the role of natural disasters and pandemics in intimate partner violence among women has been published in the academic and grey literature?

RQ2. What evidence on the role of substance use in intimate partner violence among women has been published in the academic and grey literature?

Academic literature was identified through Medline, CINAHL, PsycInfo, Cochrane, and Web of Science using the following keywords: 1) pandemics (e.g. "social isolation", "quarantine", COVID-19, etc.) and IPV (e.g. "domestic violence", "spousal abuse", etc.); and 2) substance use (e.g. "alcohol", "tobacco", "drugs", etc.) and IPV (e.g. "physical abuse", "battered women", etc.). The academic search and subsequent updates for RQ1 yielded a total of 2,676 unique returns and RQ2 yielded 4,230 unique returns (the search for RQ2 was limited to articles published between 2015-2020). In addition, we checked the references of seven systematic reviews and one paper was included for screening for RQ1 and 9 for RQ2. The records were title and abstract screened separately by two independent reviewers. Full text articles were screened by five reviewers independently and relevant data was charted in Excel. The findings from the academic literature were summarized by two reviewers with the input from all the authors and one reviewer interpreted the results for the summaries and introduction. A total of 22 papers were synthesized for RQ1 and 114 for RQ2.

Two supplemental grey literature searches were conducted to answer the two research questions using the same keywords as the academic search. For Q1, literature was identified on Data2X and the first 75 returns were considered for exclusion. For Q2, literature was identified from through a targeted search of national and international anti-violence and substance use organizations, identified in the academic literature (i.e. commentaries, editorials), and related email listservs. Full text articles were screened and relevant data was charted in Excel before being summarized.

What did the synthesis find?

The links between pandemic, IPV and SU are complex. Disasters are associated with a rise in IPV, along with lasting parallel issues such as PTSD, trauma, and mental health issues. Policy responses to pandemics, such as isolation and lockdowns, exacerbate the conditions for both, as perpetrators adopt new measures to carry out IPV. SU and IPV are bidirectionally related, in that: SU among perpetrators and/or victims can accompany violence; and SU can be a lasting adaptive coping mechanism for survivors after IPV. Best practices and interventions in response to these issues in the context of pandemics and disasters are underdeveloped. The few interventions and tools in the academic and grey literatures indicate that intensive interventions reduce IPV or SU, but rarely both, and that related mental health issues such as depression and trauma require ongoing service support. Even so, the element of coercion can apply to women experiencing IPV, SU and post disaster mental health issues, and could be a promising linking concept on which to develop better training and responses for brief interventions in disasters and pandemics. Disaster related interventions and planning must incorporate effective, timely responses to IPV; first responders must be sensitive and timely in responding to IPV during disasters; health care providers must investigate presentations of either SU or IPV for both issues; and substance use responders need training in understanding and responding concurrently to SU and IPV. Ongoing mental health issues result from both SU and IPV post disaster and need to be monitored. This area requires tailored awareness raising, first responder training, and development of brief interventions, referral tools and ongoing SU and IPV training for service providers. In short, disasters often highlight a rise in IPV and/or SU and require sharpened responses from HCP, SU workers and first responders.

What are the implications of this synthesis?

This synthesis alerts and assists first responders, substance use and violence against women service providers in understanding and better responding to both intimate partner violence and substance use in the context of disasters, pandemics, isolation, and COVID-19.

List up to 10 keywords specific to this synthesis to facilitate website search filters and sorting:

- Intimate Partner Violence; Substance Use; Pandemic; Disaster; Isolation; Health care providers; First responders; Trauma

