Exploring the Intersection of Traumatic Brain Injury and Mental Health in Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract

Introduction: One in four Canadian women experience intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased rates of IPV globally and the level of violence encountered, exposing IPV survivors to greater risk of physical injury, including traumatic brain injury (TBI). Up to 75% of survivors are suspected of sustaining a TBI and 50-75% experience mental health or substance use challenges (MHSU) as a result of IPV, resulting in extensive personal, social, and economic implications.

Objective: The objective of this scoping review was to synthesize what is currently known in the literature about MHSU and TBI among survivors of IPV and identify gaps.

Methods: MEDLINE, EMBASE, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Cochrane, Scopus, and Web of Science were searched for relevant articles using a search strategy including text words and subject headings related to TBI, IPV, and MHSU. Two reviewers independently assessed articles for inclusion.

Results: The search identified 399 unique articles, 34 of which were included in this study. Of these, 11 articles reported on MHSU in IPV-related TBI and 9 articles reported on both TBI and MHSU in IPV but did not discuss the groups together. The remainder were reviews or theses that noted MHSU in IPV-related TBI. Included articles predominantly focused on cis-gendered women in heterosexual relationships and were conducted in the United States. Only three articles focused on the experiences of Black or Indigenous women and none of the included studies discussed implications of co-occurring TBI and MHSU on survivor's healthcare-related needs or access to care.

Conclusions: Despite the high rates of co-occurring TBI and MHSU among survivors of IPV, there is little research on this intersection and no investigation of the impacts on the health system. Future research should focus on identifying the healthcare-related needs of survivors and identifying and mitigating barriers to access.